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THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE VIDEOGAME ICON

DARRAN JONES
It's clearly Strider. He exudes a coolness that other videogame heroes can only dream of having. Have I ever said how much I like him?
Expertise:
Juggling a beautiful wife, two gorgeous girls and an award winning magazine
Currently playing:
Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow Ultimate Edition
Favourite game of all time:
Strider

PAUL DRURY
Ulala from *Space Channel 5*. Villains she leads, I will follow...
Expertise:
Anti-scrolling
Currently playing:
Hotline Miami
Favourite game of all time:
Street In Space

PAUL DAVIES
I'll have to say Master Chief because of all that bullion hurt... and of course all the *Halo* games kick ass!
Expertise:
Banging my head against a brick wall
Currently playing:
Halo 4
Favourite game of all time:
Grease 'N Greasis

JASON KELK
I like cute characters so Bub and Bob both spring to mind – please don't make me disease you! **Expertise:**
Being a hamstrung hero
Currently playing:
Valhalla (Atari 8-bit)
Favourite game of all time:
ID

IAIN LEE
John Stryker from *Stryker's Run* – rough, rakishness and a little bit sleaz. My kind of guy.
Expertise:
Pretending to be an American on Xbox Live
Currently Playing:
Halo 4
Favourite game of all time:
Elite (the BBC B version)

DAVID CROOKES
Chloe from *Uncharted* because I'm sad like that. She was cold though
Expertise:
All things Amstrad CPC. Okay, Alan Lynx
Currently playing:
Grand Theft Auto IV
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword

MARTYN CARROLL
Got to be Mario. Of the 10 best games ever made, he's in about half of them!
Expertise:
8-bit stuff
Currently playing:
Brothers: A Tale Of Two Sons
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy

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LOADING...

I've played a lot of remakes lately, partly for my job and partly for my own personal enjoyment (who am I kidding? They're the same thing). Reading numerous reviews of games like *Shadowrun Returns*, *DuckTales Remastered*, *Dungeons & Dragons: Chronicles Of Mystara* and *Flashback HD* and seeing comments on the incoming *Strider* made me realise that developers are continually caught between a rock and a hard place when tackling these games. And let's not even mention the poor developers who get saddled with each new *Sonic* game.

It appears that everyone wants something different from these updates/remakes. Some want completely overhauled mechanics; others want brand new visuals, while some want the original games to be included, or have the game stick slavishly to the original version. How on earth do you keep such a diverse selection happy? While I don't create updates of games, I do deal with an eclectic audience, so I know the difficulties faced in trying to please everybody.

Having said that, I'm as vocal as anyone and I've already got a list of demands for the new *Strider* game that are as long as my arm that I'm sure won't appear. But as a gamer, I'm at least grateful that publishers are revisiting these classics, even if I occasionally end up disappointed.

Enjoy the magazine,

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Discover why this limp adaptation of the popular TV show failed to capture its anarchy

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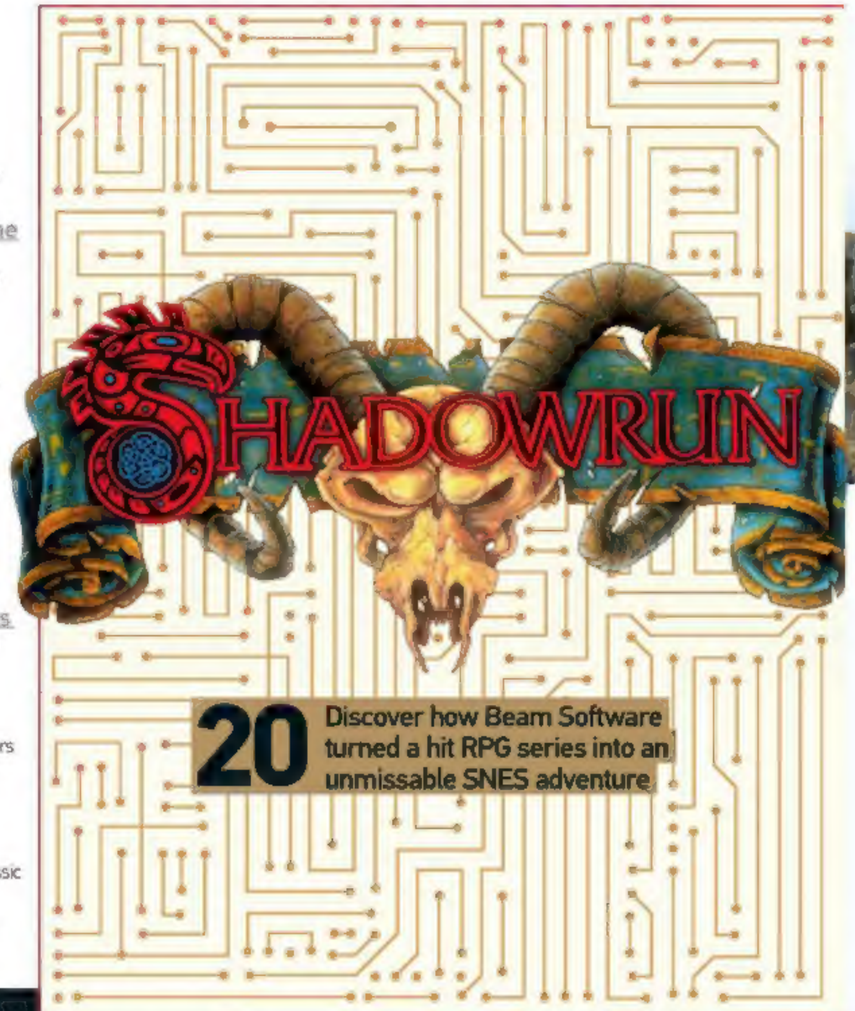

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The composer of *The Horde*, *Pandemonium!* and *Total Eclipse* explains his love of music and how it led to a career in videogames.

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He was there at the collapse of Imagine Software, started creating games in his thirties and coded some superb conversions for the Commodore 64. We discover what makes Colin tick.

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Samuel Roberts

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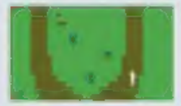

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>>GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD

>>We kick off this month's news with a world exclusive interview on Capcom's new Strider game. We also speak to Ste Pickford about the return of Plok and look at the numerous HD updates and sequels heading your way. Enjoy...

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All the news for the current month, both the past's as well as the future's

>[Xbox 360] Developer Double Helix Games doesn't have an amazing track record, but we're hoping Strider and Kane Trainor turn that around.

RESURRECTING STRIDER

JAMES VANCE TALKS EXCLUSIVELY ABOUT STRIDER'S RETURN

Strider was a revelation when it was released in 1989, delivering spectacular boss fights, imaginative level design and the greatest second level in the history of videogames.

Despite this brilliance, *Strider* only received one official sequel, and while he's appeared in countless cameo roles throughout the years, he's never been able to secure a further sequel – until now. James Vance, *Strider*'s producer, explains why the time is right for the iconic ninja to make his comeback.

So is *Strider* a reboot or a brand new game?
Strider is a brand new game. It takes place within the *Strider* universe and is a re-imagining of the hero *Strider* Hiryu's confrontation with the evil world dictator Grand Master Meio.

How did you get the job of creating *Strider*?
The original *Strider* on the Sega Mega Drive left a huge impression on me as a child and has remained one of my all-time favourite games. During my initial job interview at Capcom I was asked which Capcom franchises I would like to work on. I responded with *Okami*, *Resident Evil* and *Strider*. To my surprise, not long after I was hired I was assigned to this *Strider* project, which at that time was at the initial stage of pre-production. I then worked with Andrew Szymanski, the senior producer, key Osaka staff and Double Helix Games to create a game concept that, as *Strider* fans, we felt passionate about and that also guaranteed core gameplay, graphic and design elements that would appeal to both long-time fans and series newcomers.

Can we expect to see any enemies from the original game return?
Yes. This new *Strider* takes place in the same *Strider* universe as the previous titles, and we are very proactive in paying respect to enemies and other elements from previous games wherever they benefit the design and can provide a unique and engaging experience. At San Diego Comic-Con 2013 we revealed the Kazakh troopers, flying robots as well as a re-imagining of the Ouroboros character from previous *Strider* games. These are just a few of the familiar characters who, along with a new cast of unique characters, will make an appearance in the game.

>[Xbox 360] Strider appears to be just as nimble as he was in Capcom's original arcade game.

How are you handling the pressure from *Strider*'s many fans?
I've been a *Strider* fan since I was a child, so the main pressure to deliver a compelling and entertaining *Strider* experience comes from me. More than anything I am excited to be working on a time-honoured game with such a passionate fan following.

What new enhancements are you adding to the reboot?
The philosophy from the beginning was not to take away, but to always add to the core *Strider* experience. Hiryu begins the game as strong and as agile as in *Strider* and *Strider II*, and his abilities continue to expand across the course of the entire game. We have already revealed two plasma cypher augmentations, and have a vast array of new items and abilities for the player to discover and enjoy.

Item and ability acquisition also play into the vastly expanded size and scope of the game world. Whereas previous titles were relatively linear affairs, *Strider* features a massive, completely interconnected game world. It is through the exploration of this game world that players will discover and unlock their newfound abilities.

Finally, current and next generation hardware allows us to realise a beautiful and detailed game world using high-end graphic technologies and modern rendering techniques.

How long have you been working on the reboot of *Strider* and what's been the hardest thing you've encountered from a gameplay point of view?
I've been working on *Strider* for roughly 18 months. The most challenging gameplay element has been designing the interconnected game map for Hiryu's extremely quick and agile character. Creating logical pathways, obstacles and challenges for the player, when they can basically go anywhere and climb on anything has been a challenge. However, because we felt so strongly about delivering a large interconnected game world, we embraced this challenge from the offset and are confident players will enjoy the final product.

We know Isuke isn't involved, but are there any people from *Strider II* helping out?
Yes. Osaka based staff who worked on *Strider II* have been instrumental in shaping and contributing to the visual look and game design to ensure this new *Strider* remains true to the *Strider* universe, and at the same time delivers a genuine Capcom experience. The Capcom Osaka team art director who designed the majority of the characters in this new *Strider* – including Hiryu – was also the lead character designer for *Strider II*.

Why do you think the original *Strider* remains so popular among the gaming community?
There are a variety of reasons. For me, at the time it was the unprecedented freedom of movement and high-speed action that the game offered. There really were no other titles which allowed the player to move both horizontally and vertically, run up and down sloped surfaces and climb on any surface, all the while engaging the enemy in combat. The graphics, which featured detailed and extremely unique designs, were also amazing.

The original *Strider* came at the transition from the 8-bit to the 16-bit generation, and was the first home console game that wowed the world with power of 16-bit!

We've worked very hard to deliver and expand upon *Strider* and *Strider II*'s high-speed action and sense of freedom, and hope that just like the original we will be one of the first games next generation users will be proud to add to their collection.

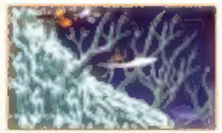
>[Xbox 360] It certainly needs a little more colour, but the team has nailed *Strider*'s cool look.

What We Want From Capcom's reboot

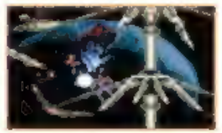
>> How Double Helix Games can make its new Strider game even better

Mecha Pon
Strider has some of the most imaginative bosses around, and Mecha Pon is easily one of our favourites. He's essentially a gigantic gorilla who is not afraid to pound Strider into the ground if he gets too close to him. Double Helix Games is being a little cagey about whether he's going to appear, but we can't really imagine a *Strider* game without him.

Spectacle
Strider has the greatest second level of any videogame ever made. This is fact. As a result, we're expecting Double Helix Games to somehow top this momentous piece of level design when *Strider* gets released next year. It seems unlikely, based on the continuous world it's trying to create, but that won't stop us sadly wishing for it like the fanboys we are.



Unlockables
Everyone likes free stuff, so why not include both *Strider* and *Strider II* as unlockables upon completing the game. We can't imagine they would be that hard to include and it would save us a fortune, as we could ignore the ridiculously expensive PlayStation PAL version that keeps climbing in price. Come on guys, you know it makes sense.



A sequel
Yes we're jumping the gun, but we want a sequel. In fact we don't want a sequel, but a simple remake of the original game. Wayforward probably isn't busy now *DuckTales Remastered* is finished, so give the developer a big sack of cash and let its amazing artists run rampant. We can only imagine how amazing an HD, 2D remake would look.

THE RETRO DEBATE

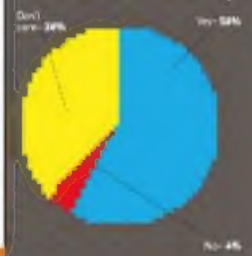
>> From the forum: Readers weigh in on Strider

VISIT RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM TO HAVE YOUR SAY

"Never been a fan of the original Striders. Too glitchy to look good. Really looking forward to Castle of Illusion remake the most" samhain81

"I'm very much looking forward to this! I'm feeling confident already that this will be better than the absolutely tripe Strider II (Mega Drive) Never has a sequel let me down has much as that did" ArchaicKoala

"Years ago I played MAME – every single game – and concluded Strider was the best arcade game ever, and this was before I'd picked up Retro Gamer. So yes, I am excited, Strider is just something else in my opinion. Having said that... I hope they don't muck it up!" [illegible]



retrocolumns

» RETRO RECOLLECTIONS WITH CELEB IAIN LEE

Here's the bio...
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does lots of stand-up as well as presenting the *2 Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.

Hi there, my name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro

Ouch! That Hurt

What's the worst moment in your gaming history? For me it was probably when I made the decision to buy my first PlayStation. I had been so blown away by my friend's Sega Saturn that I knew I had to get back into games in a big way. I trawled all over London (I didn't have the internet then! How mental is that?) going into various stores asking whether I should get a Saturn or a PlayStation. I did not want to f**** up like my dad did in the Eighties when we ended up getting a Betamax video. And to be honest, that was what was putting me off getting a PlayStation – the fact that Sony had let me down so badly in the past resulting in actual physical injury as I constantly got my face pummelled by the rough and common VHS owners.

I eventually settled on the PlayStation. It was tough, but most of the evidence was indicating that the Saturn was possibly already on the turn and there was a massive supply of games for Sony's wonder machine.

The thing is, at the time I had just left college, had no work, was signing on and was skint. Absolutely broke. I think the PlayStation was around £400. A *lot* of money, but I just had to have one. I knew that, somehow, this machine was important to me and that my life would be tied to it and gaming in one way or another. All right, I didn't get that spiritual feeling, I just wanted to play *WipEout*.

Once I'd made the choice, I then had to find the best deal. I think I ended up getting it from Dixons, which was offering some free games with it. I did something I had never done before and bought it on the never never. There was no way I could pay for it outright and I couldn't ask my mum for the money! She would be furious. I finally went in, determined to make this life changing purchase...

Got it, took it home and played the shit out of it. As well as *WipEout* I also got some game where you were a jumping rabbit and had to, you know, jump and stuff. I think you jumped onto clouds. I don't remember. I remember even less of the third game I got which was pony. But I didn't care. I had my console and I was happy.

That changed 7 days later.

Literally a week to the day I walked past the same shop I had made this extravagant purchase from. I could not believe my eyes. The expensive bundle that had cost me £400 was reduced to an earth-shatteringly low £259. Shit. That hurt. I felt betrayed and stupid. Why had I jumped into this so recklessly? I hadn't. I'd spent three months weighing it all up, but still...

We've all been there, spent more money than we should've, felt betrayed by a decision a company made... but I guess that's part of the romance of videogames.

*Playstation photography courtesy of Evan Amos

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Jon and Ste Pickford pose for a publicity shot of the rather excellent *Magnetic Blocks Bugaboo*.

ISNES! Plok starred not as the hero of his own Super Nintendo game back in 1993.

PLOK RETURNS

STE PICKFORD ON PLOK'S COMIC COMEBACK

It's been a while since the Pickford brothers' limb-flinging platform hero buzz-sawed into action on the Super Nintendo and, despite a cameo 'boss' appearance in Super Fighter Team's Lynx shooter *Zaku* a few years ago, we've missed the cute little hoodie's flag-hunting antics. However, we can happily inform you that Plok is back in his own regular online comic-strip, *Plok The Exploding Man*, written and created by the Pickfords themselves. We asked Ste Pickford to spill the beans on Plok's new career as a comic character, and why the brothers decided the time was right for his return.

"Partly, it was a response to the constant requests we get for a re-release of *Plok* on Virtual Console/3DS, or for a sequel," Ste explains. "But, mainly, I think we just wanted to do something with Plok. He's got a lot of fans, and he's a character we are proud of creating. We felt that we should be making more use of him, and a comic strip seemed like the quickest way of bringing him back."

"We thought doing a comic in our spare time would also be a nice way to put something out there more regularly so we'd get the satisfaction of 'completing' something on a more regular basis than once every couple of years, and also get some regular feedback. Our plan is to publish a new strip each time we finish drawing a new one, so I'm hoping that's about one a week."

Ste seems pleased with the reaction to the project (three comic strips have been posted as we go to press.) "It's been great fun getting in touch with *Plok* fans out there, and hearing all their stories about how *Plok* affected their childhood and how they'd curse at how hard it was," he chuckles. "I was worried people would say 'is that it?' when they saw a little four-panel comic strip, but it's all been really positive so far." So with all this new-found attention for the explosively-volatile little fella, what about a new *Plok* game then Ste? "No comment!" he laughs. Still, according to the Pickfords' website "anything is possible..." But for now, catch up with Plok's new comic-style adventures at www.zee-3.com/plok.

The first episode of *Plok The Exploding Man* sees him waking up from a very long nap...

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THE SOUL STILL BURNS

SOULCALIBUR II GETS HD UPDATE

Namco Bandai has announced that a new HD update of *SoulCalibur II*, with full online multiplayer support, is on its way for Xbox 360 and PS3. The re-release is set for some time this autumn to tie in with the tenth anniversary of the classic weapon-based brawler. Namco is promising "vibrant updated graphics" and an "online infrastructure featuring brand new netcode overseen by the Project Soul team", which leads us to believe that it will be much better than the simplified port of *SoulCalibur* previously released on Xbox Live. As we have fond memories of wacking Darran around the head with a lethal-looking flail thingy as the saucy Ivy Valentine on the PS2 version, we're looking forward to doing it all over again in pin-sharp resolution.

(Xbox) *Soul Calibur II* looked fantastic on last-gen consoles, so now it should look amazing.

LETS GO!

LEMMINGS IMMORTALIZED IN BRONZE

A new sculpture commemorating DMA Design's *Lemmings* has been unveiled in Dundee, close to the company's former headquarters. Created by sculptor and *Lemmings* fan Alyson Conway, the artwork was commissioned by the city's council in partnership with Scottish Enterprise. It joins existing tributes to Dundee's culture – sculptures of Desperate Dan and Minnie the Minx of *The Dandy* and *Beano* comic fame. "I completed *Lemmings* and its follow-up back in the day, so I feel I know them pretty well," stated Alyson in Dundee's *The Courier*. "The game was created at the bottom of Perth Road, so my idea was that the Lemmings come wandering up the road to the new steps at Seabraes."

Lemmings was a massive hit for the Scottish developer back in 1991, selling over 16 million copies on multiple platforms, including an impressive 55,000 units on its release day alone. From what we hear the work has already caused quite a stir among the local populace – and also around the world – among fans of the survival-averse mop-topped characters. The sculpture is a wonderful symbol and a nod to Dundee's rich history of game design, and we're hoping this could be the start of a movement to celebrate more British gaming icons in similar style. What about a statue of Sabreman in Twycross town centre? Or a six-foot Miner Willy on Liverpool's historic waterfront? The possibilities are endless!

Alyson Conway poses with her Lemmings sculpture in Seabraes, Dundee.

LARA'S BACK

NEW TOMB RAIDER CONFIRMED

Square Enix have confirmed that a next-gen *Tomb Raider* game is in the works, following the recent reboot of the franchise that has now sold in excess of 3 million copies. The company's European and North American CEO, Phil Rogers, hinted that the new title might be linked to an upcoming Dark Horse comic book series, which would bridge the gap between the two game instalments, while comic series writer Gail Simone confirmed this would be the case in an interview with Kotaku.

Lara Croft Crystal Dynamics adds more hands to its next *Tomb Raider* game.

We're really please with this recent announcement, as *Tomb Raider*, while far from perfect, was a cracking adventure that helped make Lara more relevant to today's gamers. Here's hoping that the sequel focuses more on the survival aspects that were a little undercooked. We'd like to see a bigger focus on actual tomb raiding as well. Just keep Rhianna Pratchett involved.

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All About Space

In issue 10 of **All About Space**, we're looking at the technology and mission goals of the James Webb Space telescope, one of the most exciting and ambitious projects of the decade. We're also exploring the deadly potential of the Solar System in Killer Comets.

games™

The new issue of **games™** has a complete guide to Rare, from its early NES days to contentious modern Xbox titles, as well as an examination of which next-gen games will permanently affect the landscape of game design. There's also an interview with Gary Bracey on the glory days of Ocean.

How It Works

This month's **How It Works** powers up an electrifying special feature on energy, from what it is, to how it is formed and onto why it can be used to power many of our things on Earth. In addition we have a bombastic feature on battleship weaponry, a fantastic feature on fjords and a huge article on the world's biggest animals.

Apps Magazine

The console series *Deus Ex* migrates to mobile this issue, with a review of the original sequel *The Fall*, plus *Sky Gamblers: Cold War* and more games for iPhone, iPad and Android. We also compile the definitive list of essential apps for everything from social networking to shopping.

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retro columns

>> PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio...

In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000. Then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.

Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years

Retro Reading Rocks

Magazines are better gaming companions than websites, I'm now sure of it. The spirit of *Zzap!64*, *Mean Machines* and old-school *C&VG* burned brightest of all because they were on the printed page.

Before I stride ahead and discover that this sweet-smelling meadow before me is in fact a sea of forum snipers, I should point out that this isn't about quality over quantity. Nor is it about how hard it was to share your written opinion/expertise with fellow gamers "when I were a lad". None of that *Monty Python* 'Four Yorkshiremen' one-upmanship, I promise. There is, however, an element of pining for the old days – but I think that's okay inside of **Retro Gamer**.

The potential for games mags to incite passion for a new and developing scene was (and still is) because of, rather than in spite of, limitations: a fixed number of pages at a team's disposal and on each one a restricted amount of space to cram with fresh enthusiasm; an immovable deadline to hit each month and a constant clock-a-ticking pressure to make everything count.

Physical restrictions of printed publications force editorial teams to make brave calls regarding the games and gaming features that are included. Most visible of all, the cover story counts for so much – not only, ideally, promising an exclusive inside track on the hottest thing around, but doing so in a way that conveys the attitude of everything else found inside.

What I've always found to be the fun part about games magazines is that what you do find inside often bears no resemblance to other lifestyle publications, with templates tossed out of the window to encapsulate the nature of the experience unique to each game. *C&VG*'s *Mario 64*, *NiGHTS* and *Panzer Dragoon* pages were personal highlights – *Haynes Repair Manual* meets magical kingdoms. You won't see any such artistic explosion on a website because page-elements are stuck to a grid.

One last sign of the times that influenced how magazines came together throughout the Eighties and Nineties was the culture of working together in an office, whereas now it's not only website teams that work remotely (from home). A bunch of lads and lasses serving time on impossible schedules for months or years on end became as tight-knit as a sports team, sharing the creative spark of a rock band while observing the regimented realities of a military unit. A chap who I enjoy chatting to on Twitter (Steve Turner, @gamesblake) recently pointed out that "there was a period of time in the early to mid-Nineties where you had writers that you wanted to be mates with. That's gone now." Great mags were/are the voices of those teams, thrilled to be in their privileged position to share.

Finally the secret sauce, overlooked, undervalued and all-but outmoded today, is the anticipation associated with a new issue balanced with the length of time that it satisfies such expectation. For example, *Edge* maintains a degree of mystique to this day – even with so much information widely available online – teasing us with its timeless Next Month pages.

On a good month, magazines drip-feed a perfect snapshot of where our attention is best focussed – a memorable guide to what's important from a team that you've grown to love over time... kind of like **Retro Gamer**.

retrodiary

13 September – 10 October

>> A month of retro events both past and present

17 September 1993
■ The first 32-bit console released in Europe appears, the Amiga CD32. It is also the last to be discontinued...

17 September 2013
■ Rockstar Games' hotly anticipated *Grand Theft Auto V* is due for release on PS3 and Xbox 360

20 September 1992
■ The arcade coin-op *Blue Print*, designed by Ashby, is released by Jaleco.

23 September 1993
■ Sonic The Hedgehog stars in *Sonic CD* on the Sega Mega-CD, released first in Japan.

27 September 1985
■ Namco releases the coin-op game *Motos*, in which you must bump your enemies off the playfield. It's essentially dodgems in space.

24 September 2002
■ Microsoft acquires the videogames developer Rare Ltd, formerly known as Ultimate Play The Game. Yours for just $375 million.

24 September 2001
■ The wonderful action-adventure *Ico* is released on PS2 by Sony.

24 September 1992
■ Enjoy fisticuffs of the coin-op variety with the arcade release of SNK's *Art Of Fighting*.

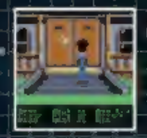
27 September 2013
■ Electronic Arts is due to release *FIFA 14* on PlayStation 3 and 4 as well as Xbox 360.

29 September 2000
■ BioWare develops and interplay publishes *Baldur's Gate II: Shadows Of Amn* in Europe for PC.

29 September 2006
■ Planet Moon Studios' third-person shooter *Infected* is released on Sony's PSP across Europe.

30 September 1997
■ *Total Annihilation*, the real-time strategy game, is released on PC by GT Interactive.

6 October 1990
■ The Sega Game Gear handheld console is officially launched, starting with Japan.



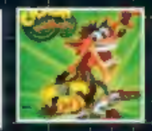
5 October 1987
■ LucasFilm releases its point-and-click graphic adventure game *Maniac Mansion* on the Apple II and Commodore 64.

4 October 2002
■ *Super Mario Sunshine* is released across Europe on the Nintendo GameCube.

1 October 2009
■ Sony releases the PSP Go handheld console in Europe and America. No UMD drive this time though...

7 October 1983
■ The Memotech MTX500 is released. Big, black, bold and beautiful... with very little software support.

7 October 2003
■ Nokia releases the N-Gage, a mobile phone/handheld gaming device mash-up. It fails to impress...



8 October 2004
■ The open-world platform game *Crash Twinsanity* is released in Europe on the PS2 by Vivendi.

10 October 2013
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

VISIT RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM TO HAVE YOUR SAY

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

CHARTS

JANUARY 1981

ARCADE

1. Pac-Man (Namco)
2. Missile Command (Atari)
3. Asteroids (Atari)
4. Battlezone (Atari)
5. Moon Cresta (Nichibutsu)

GAME & WATCH

1. Fire (Nintendo)
2. Manhole (Nintendo)
3. Vermin (Nintendo)
4. Judge (Nintendo)
5. Flagman Nintendo)

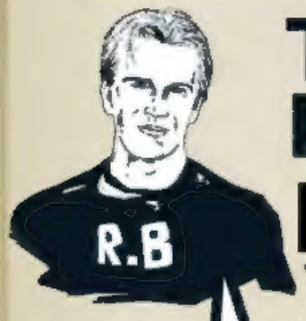
ATARI 2600

1. Adventure (Atari)
2. Circus Atari (Atari)
3. Dragster (Activision)
4. Pele's Soccer (Atari)
5. Othello (Atari)

MUSIC

1. Imagine (John Lennon)
2. Antmusic (Adam & The Ants)
3. Happy Xmas (War Is Over) (John & Yoko)
4. Woman (John Lennon)
5. Stop The Cavalry (Jona Lewie)

• (Arcade) Coming soon to a greasy spoon near you: *Battlezone* or *Missile Command* (right) in the smaller Cabaret cabinet. Get yer kebab off the joystick.



JANUARY 1981 – it's cabaret time at Atari, Vtech goes educational, Dodge 'Em arrives on the 2600, Pulsar vies for your loose change in coin-op land and Atari goes holoptic with the Cosmos. Richard Burton isn't here, it's a hologram...

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JANUARY 1981

In an interesting move by Atari, it announced that it would start introducing a new size of arcade coin-op cabinet called the Cabaret, which was a smaller version of a full-size upright machine.

Having a much smaller footprint than your standard coin-op, the Cabaret was targeting small businesses that struggled with limited floor space. Videogaming and arcade gaming meant huge business, so now even establishments with minimal room could reap the benefits of the coin-op gaming boom... as would Atari, presumably...

The first games available on the Cabaret cabinet list were *Battlezone*, *Missile Command* and *Asteroids*.

Vtech, makers of LCD and LED handheld games revealed that it was to preview its first tabletop electronic toy at the New York Toy Fair the following month. *Lesson One* was a tabletop version of its first ever educational game, the *Computron*, a book-style game that was influenced by Texas Instruments' *Speak & Spell*, another popular educational handheld used for developing basic spelling, maths and word recognition.

Lesson One sold extremely well, and Vtech went on to become a key player in the educational electronic gaming market. *Lesson One* was re-released in 1989 with updated casing and software.

Atari had some major hardware news that would have gamers parping in their trousers with methane-fuelled excitement. Atari announced that it would be previewing its latest console, the Atari Cosmos, at the New York Toy Fair.

The console's selling point was the use of holography in its games. Unfortunately, the games wouldn't be a true 3D holographic representation, more a series of moving LED lights in a grid pattern behind a transparent holographic picture. This picture acted more as a piece of window dressing than anything you could actually interact with. Nonetheless, Atari thought that it would add more depth to the playing field, giving the sense of an environment rather than the usual flat series of lights that tabletop games all followed.

The Cosmos was also relatively powerful. It had two microprocessors inside its plastic underbelly; one to run the LEDs and another accounting for the sound, which was reportedly very realistic and crystal clear.

Eight games were to be released, including titles such as *Superman*, *Asteroids*, *Space Invaders* and *Road Runner*, which were expected to be priced at around ten dollars each. The price was kept so low due to the cartridge being little more than a big plastic key.

The Cosmos was pre-programmed with all eight games, meaning that you could buy the game pack containing the cartridge case that allowed access to the game, complete with the appropriate holographic backdrop. It was something of a unique move on Atari's part.

The Cosmos was developed by Allan Alcorn, Roger Hector and Harry Jenkins, and their faith in the holoptics, as Atari called it, was unwavering. Sadly, the president of Atari, Ray Kassar, thought otherwise, despite some strong indications at the Toy Fair that the Cosmos would sell well. Pre-orders for the console just from the one viewing at the show were reportedly as high as 8,000 units.

Having spent considerable time, money and resources on the Cosmos, with the project first starting way back in 1978, the project was cancelled within touching distance of an official release. Despite several hundred empty console casings, packaging boxes and promotional items such as flyers being produced for shows and distributional sales packs, the Atari Holoptics laboratory was closed and the Cosmos was shelved.

Reasons for the Cosmos pull-out varied, from reports that Ray Kassar thought the project to be too risky and that consumers wouldn't be ready for such an innovative product, to simply that the tabletop gaming market was slowing down dramatically with TV games and consoles becoming more popular. Others thought that the promise of holographic games was such a lure that, when it became common knowledge that the games would prove to be flashing LEDs behind a plastic overlay, interest wavered.

In spite of three years of development, there are very few instances of Atari Cosmos items in general circulation. There are reportedly three empty tabletop shells and only two working Cosmos models in existence, but you would expect to have to sell a kidney and your first born child to fund the purchase. The holographic game overlays appear infrequently on internet auction sites and can be snagged for up to £100 a piece.

A cheaper gaming alternative from Atari would've been the Atari 2600 game *Dodge 'Em*. It was part maze game, part driving, as you swerved and negotiated your way around a four-lane maze collecting dots while avoiding the other cars intent on crashing into you. Once the maze was cleared it was straight on to the next. Simple yet fun, you could play against the computer opponent or take on a friend and it was reasonably priced at £16.95.

Pulsar was released in arcades this month. Produced by Sega and Gremlin Industries, *Pulsar* was a top down maze game which saw you take control of a tank that had to acquire keys to open gateways to the next level while avoiding any maze dwelling nasties, all before your limited fuel supplies ran out.

Each key was a different colour and, once collected, your tank also changed to that colour. You can then get more points for shooting nasties of that same colour. Later levels feature several keys and moving mazes, and although simple to pick up and play, *Pulsar* did have a naive charm not unlike an early Sinclair Spectrum game. Maybe the fact that *Pulsar* ran on a Z80 processor had something to do with it...

• (Atari 2600) *Dodge 'Em* was like a cross between *Pac-Man* and a driving game. Simple stuff, but a great little two-player game.

• (Arcade) *Asteroids* also received the Cabaret cabinet treatment.

JANUARY WORLD NEWS

12 January saw American television air the first episode of prime-time soap opera *Dynasty*. Featuring the well-off Carrington family, it was pitched as a direct competitor to the other big soap opera of the time, *Dallas*. It starred John Forsythe as Blake Carrington, Linda Evans as his current wife Krystle and Joan Collins as his malicious former wife, Alexis Carrington Colby. It ran for over eight years, spanning an impressive 220 episodes. A spin-off series, *The Colbys*, aired in 1986, but it never received the same acclaim as *Dynasty*.

14 January saw some schlocky cinema action thanks to the world premiere of David Cronenberg's movie, *Scanners*. It starred Michael Ironside and Stephen Lack as the most powerful scanners, individuals who could use psychic powers to inflict pain and control on others. Ironside's character, Darryl Revok, ran an underground scanner organisation that wanted to take over the world. Much fighting and plenty of head-popping action ensued...

15 January saw more television goodness arrive in the form of the superb *Hill Street Blues*. The fictional American police drama followed the lives and work of a police precinct and fast became essential television viewing, with it picking up many awards during its six year, seven series run of 146 episodes. A mere ten years later, Krisalis produced a reasonably playable Amiga and Atari ST game based on the show.

21 January saw more crimson spillages with the premiere of *The Howling*, which featured a community inhabited by strange residents and a forest full of werewolves. It starred Dee Wallace and Patrick Macnee.

THIS MONTH IN...

COIN CONNECTION

Coin Connection featured a small article on Atari Ireland, the facility in Tipperary where the bulk of European coin-op machines were manufactured and distributed. It also touched upon the forthcoming release of *Red Baron*, a World War II flight simulation which used the same graphics system as *Battlezone*.

ANALOG

It was issue one of *Analog*, running at a flimsy 46 pages. In the news section it reported on the progression of the Atari Cosmos tabletop console, its use of holoptics and the impending releases of *Asteroids* and *Missile Command* on the trusty old Atari 2600.

BYTE

Byte finally reviewed Sinclair's ZX80 computer. Originally due out early 1980, it had arrived in the autumn. By that time the price had dipped under $200, which Clive Sinclair used as a selling point. *Byte* found the ZX80 to be "high performance, low cost and best used for learning the concepts of programming".

• (Arcade) Sega/Gremlin's uncomplicated game of shooting enemies and unlocking doors was more testing than it looked.

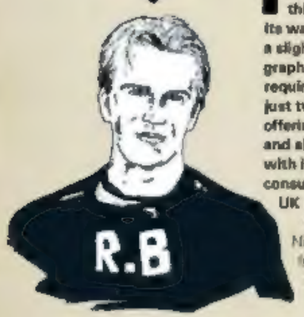
BACK TO THE NINETIES

• [Sega Saturn] An exclusive 3D Sonic game just for the Sega Saturn? Nope – it's been cancelled. Bob.

• The Game Boy Pocket versus Game Boy original. The question is – what do you do if you don't have any pockets??

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JULY 1996

JULY 1996 – Game Boy shrinks, N64 Turok delayed, Saturn NiGHTS Into Dreams released, Sonic X-Treme sinks and Phantasmagoria 2 stinks. Richard Burton gets disembowelled yet again…



If you found the original Nintendo Game Boy a bit on the chunky side there was good news, as a smaller, thinner, lighter handheld was on its way – the Game Boy Pocket. It had a slightly larger screen that showed graphics in true black and white and required fewer batteries, running on just two AAAs rather than four AAs, offering up to ten hours of gaming. Oh, and all its games were still compatible with its older, fatter brother. Japanese consumers got first dibs with a USA/UK release following later.

Coming soon to the newly released Nintendo 64 was a promising game from Acclaim, namely *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter*. It also had the honour of being the first game for the N64 developed by a third party.

However, development wasn't without its sticking points, and the proposed September launch of the title looked unlikely. After play testing, Acclaim decided that the game wasn't sufficiently playable and fell short of what it had envisaged quality-wise. Acclaim delayed the release to tinker with the gameplay and polish out the rougher parts of the game, finally letting it loose in February.

The extra time spent proved worthwhile, with *Turok* eventually selling over 1.5 million units, an impressive figure. Its good showing helped boost sales of the Nintendo 64 console but also kept Acclaim's financial woes at bay, arguably saving the ailing company. Such was the critical response to *Turok* that it became a long-running and lucrative franchise – which is now a bit rubbish. Oh well…

Japanese Sega Saturn owners were positively throbbing in anticipation with the news that Sega were releasing *NiGHTS Into Dreams* on 5 July.

The aim of this action adventure game, designed by the team behind *Sonic The Hedgehog*, was to stop Wizeman The Wicked from taking Ideya, the physical forms of human energies and personality represented by coloured orbs. Wizeman is planning to use their energy to leave his domain and enter our own world.

After choosing between two children, Claris or Elliot, you had to embark on a 3D free-roaming journey to collect their lost Ideya. Along the way the pair meet the jester-esque Nights who works for Wizeman, but rebels and plots with the children to defeat his former boss.

Entering the Ideya Palace near the start of a level introduces the side-scrolling flying sequence that *NiGHTS* has become famous for. You had to gather more Ideya and fly through large airborne rings while battling a selection of henchman throughout each stage and a series of imaginative bosses. It's worth noting that your flying time is limited, and contact with an enemy loses more time. Eventually you'll fall to the ground, returning to your chosen child.

The graphics and soundtrack in *NiGHTS Into Dreams* were both pretty outstanding. The flying/collecting sequences featuring Nights were remarkably good with superbly designed graphics, all of which ran fluidly and really conveyed the sensation of flying. This was helped in no small part by its regularly shifting camera angles. The game itself was fast-paced, graphically and aurally stunning and a pleasure to play.

Star Ocean was another game to be released first in Japan that sadly remained a Japanese exclusive, due to the developing company, Enix, closing its American studio shortly before the game's development was complete. The Super Nintendo action role-playing game used a top-down perspective and was well received by critics and gamers alike, becoming the first in a seven game series.

Star Ocean was also just one of two games – the other being *Street Fighter Alpha 2* – to use a special compression chip, the S-DD1, in its cartridge to compress gaming data. This was due to the detailed graphics used on the SNES and the extensive voice acting implemented throughout the gameplay. The compression chip also doubled as a copy protection system, making games that employed it far more difficult to copy and emulate.

Controversial release of the month was *Phantasmagoria 2: A Puzzle Of Flesh* by Sierra Entertainment on PC, a sequel to the contentious original. The interactive movie game leant heavily on the psychological element of its horror theme making the point-and-click adventure a harrowing journey. The game contained extreme violence and sexual content and was strictly censored in several countries while being banned in many others.

You controlled the seemingly dull Curtis Craig, an office worker with a hidden past. He had been institutionalised a year prior and was now suffering from hallucinations of horror and gore in his office environment. A co-worker was later found brutally murdered in his office cubicle. More gore and murders followed, and it seemed that the company that you work for is linked to the mysterious Project Threshold and Dimension X…

Sadly, the game was a clunky, linear affair that could be completed quickly. The sheer amount of Full Motion Video in the game meant that actual gameplay and interactivity within the game suffered greatly. The storyline was also criticised, particularly for the amount of sexual content inherent in it, including instances of sadomasochism and rape. The censors also marked it down for use of the F-word and a disembowelment scene. Censors, reviewers and gamers all gave *Phantasmagoria 2: A Puzzle Of Flesh* a wide berth, and quite rightly so.

In addition to *NiGHTS*, Sega Saturn owners were also looking forward to the return of *Sonic The Hedgehog*, who was due to make his first original Sega Saturn appearance in *Sonic X-Treme*. With a Christmas release mooted, development was progressing at a snail's pace. The original game engine had been viewed by concerned Sega Japan representatives, who were fairly unimpressed with the progress made.

They requested changes to be made that, realistically, put the proposed deadline out of reach. When one project director quit and the other suffered a long-term illness, it was decided that the entire *Sonic X-Treme* project would be cancelled. Still, at least we have *Sonic R*…

THIS MONTH IN…

MEAN MACHINES SEGA

A trend becoming increasingly popular on consoles was the plentiful releases of retro gaming compilations. Forthcoming titles included *Sega Ages* (Sega Saturn), *Atari Classics* (Mega Drive) and *Williams Arcade Classics* (PlayStation). Retro gaming was as popular back in the Nineties as it is now it seems…

MAXIMUM

It was issue seven of the glossy magazine and, sadly, it was also the last. *Maximum* would be "taking a break" before coming back slimmer, cheaper and more 32-bit orientated. *Maximum* also touched on retro gaming and particularly emulation, looking at ways of playing aged Spectrum, C64 and Colecovision titles.

AMIGA POWER

Amiga Power ran a number of interesting features in issue 63. In addition to explaining why film licences should be strangled at birth, there was also an excellent article that explored the possible connection between Amiga games and Michael Caine. Disappointment of the month was the 20 per cent scoring *Valhalla 3*.

• [Sega Saturn] Strange, beautiful, atmospheric and extremely playable – *NiGHTS Into Dreams* was superb.

• [Nintendo 64] *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter* did wonders for the N64 and also for its development company Acclaim.

JULY WORLD NEWS

5 July saw the UK release of *Mission: Impossible* starring Tom Cruise as Ethan Hunt, a member of the Impossible Mission Force, an independent espionage agency.

A mission in Prague goes disastrously wrong, the team is compromised and all of them are seemingly killed. IMF believes Hunt to be a mole who sabotaged the mission. He goes on the run and recruits some former IMF agents with a plan to clear his name.

Action, adventure, twists, fish tanks, exploding chewing gum and a helicopter stuck to a high speed train going through the Channel Tunnel – pretty much all you need for a summer action blockbuster.

10 July saw the awful news that Lin Russell and her six-year-old daughter Megan had been murdered near to their home in Kent after walking home from school through woodland. Nine-year-old Josie Russell was found with severe head injuries but made an almost full recovery and helped police with their enquiries. 38-year-old Michael Stone was later arrested, charged and found guilty. He received three life sentences.

19 July saw the UK release of the Adam Sandler comedy *Happy Gilmore*. He played an ice hockey player that finds out he has the most powerful golfing drive in the world. He joins the PGA tour in an attempt to win the prize money to save his grandmother's house, but his hot-tempered ice hockey attitude remains…

CHARTS

JULY 1996

SUPER NINTENDO

1. Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest (Nintendo)
2. Killer Instinct (Nintendo)
3. Yoshi's Island (Nintendo)
4. FIFA Soccer '96 (EA)
5. PGA Tour Golf '96 (THQ)

SEGA SATURN

1. Street Fighter Alpha (Virgin Games)
2. Panzer Dragoon Zwei (Sega)
3. Sega Rally (Sega)
4. Virtua Cop (Sega)
5. NFL: Quarterback Club (Sega)

SEGA MEGA DRIVE

1. Toy Story (Sega)
2. FIFA Soccer '96 (EA)
3. Sonic And Knuckles (Sega)
4. Australian Rugby League (EA)
5. Ecco The Dolphin 2: Tides Of Time (Sega)

MUSIC

1. Killing Me Softly (Fugees)
2. Wannabe (Spice Girls)
3. Born Slippy (Underworld)
4. Forever Love (Gary Barlow)
5. Mysterious Girl (Peter Andre)

Chuck Norris Superkicks

WE WISH CHUCK NORRIS WOULD DESTROY IT WITH A SUPER KICK

#66

• XONOX • ATARI 2600 • 1983

I really, really want to like this game. Any game starring the hardest man that there ever was and that there ever will be has surely got to be good... right? The answer, unfortunately, is no.

What really lets *Chuck Norris Superkicks* down are its controls. They're bad. They're really, really bad. You can play this game hundreds of times and never improve. When you first appear on the fighting playfield it's just you (Chuck) and the bad guy. You charge at him, fingers poised on the joystick to roundhouse kick the mother in the face. You approach, you're ready and then, POW, you're on the floor. And then you're on the floor again. You get up again, but now – from nowhere – the baddie has got a gun. He shoots you – you go down. He shoots you again – you die and wind up at the start. And that's how it goes, over and over until you finally, well... game over.

I remember being so excited to get this game only to become disheartened with it. No matter how quick I thought I was, the henchman was always quicker. Even when I forced myself to sit down for a proper session the best I ever did was get to the second level, where there were two henchmen – both quicker than me – meaning that I died and went back to the start even quicker.

I'm sure there are folk out there – folk willing to put the time in – who really enjoy this game, but for me, it's just not any fun.

SHADOWRUN

It pushed the SNES's capabilities to its limits and had a fanbase eagerly awaiting an adaptation of their beloved tabletop RPG. Denis Murphy breaks down the story behind a cyberpunk classic

This year saw the release of *Shadowrun Returns*, one of the many success stories that have emerged from the creation of Kickstarter. However, though Hairbrained Schemes has brought its vision of *Shadowrun* to fruition 24 years after its creation as a tabletop RPG, Beam Software created the first videogame incarnation of *Shadowrun* for the SNES back in 1993, a title that blended both the RPG and action genres – as well as reality and the virtual world.

Originally pitched by Gregg Barnett in conjunction with Jordan Weisman of FASA and accepted by Data East, *Shadowrun* was in limbo during development due to his sudden departure from the project. With Gregg absent, the game was heavily reworked during development, as one developer puts it, "to make it actually achievable." After slightly deviating from Gregg's original vision for it to have a "strong noir feel", one major change to the gameplay was the removal of the ability to use a motorcycle to traverse the city. Instead, a train system was implemented, thus cutting down on excessive sprites – a problem that was persistent during the game's development.

Despite seeing changes throughout development from Gregg's originally accepted pitch, the main focus of *Shadowrun* remained: to deliver a game that both fans of the tabletop RPG and newcomers could enjoy. Game designer on the project after Gregg departed, [redacted] reveals his appreciation of tabletop RPGs, "I'm a long time RPG enthusiast. I knew of the *Shadowrun* game (though at that time, I wasn't a player myself). I had my own RPG games published out in the marketplace (*Albedo*, *Lace & Steel*), so I wanted to do a good job for my fellow RPG fans."

Despite admittedly not being an active player of *Shadowrun* himself at the time, Paul instantly saw the possibilities that the universe offered and was determined to get its videogame translation correct. "It offered a chance to do adventures that operated on both the physical level, and also on the plane of cyberspace," he explains. "Plus, most adventures up to that point had been about individual characters. *Shadowrun* was about assembling teams." With the team assembled and a tabletop RPG fan as its lead, *Shadowrun*'s development went into full swing.

The game opens in Seattle, Washington in the year 2050, amid a sprawling cyberpunk backdrop. The story to *Shadowrun* was simple, yet effective. After being gunned down and left for dead, the player takes command of mercenary Jake Armitage and must find out who the mysterious 'Drake' is, the individual who ordered his execution. However, the first issue was whether the world the original tabletop RPG envisioned could be physically realised within the confines of a simple SNES cartridge.

Creating *Shadowrun*'s world was no easy task. The choice to present the game from an isometric perspective was, in part, picked to give the illusion of a fully 3D world, seeing as such an environment on the SNES wasn't feasible at that time. As system programmer [redacted] puts it, "We wanted the game to be in 3D, not top-down as in other RPGs. A room-based isometric view was designed. The overall graphical design was highly tailored by the systems hardware, including the scrolling of two screens and also the number of levels of items that could be overlapped." For a game with its feet placed firmly in the realm of a rule-based tabletop RPG, Beam Software looked to [redacted] who served as map constructor on the project. "To be honest, there wasn't really an approach or a plan," he recalls. "Between us, Andrew Buttery and I were in charge of making all of the maps for the game. As is always the case, we were working on the maps at the same time the game engine and the map design tool were being created." Also praising the freedom given to him during development, Justin says, "Most of the time, we were given a great deal of freedom to create the maps. We worked with the artists on elements for each of the areas, like the city streets, the docks or the ship. The most important thing was for us to try to find new and interesting ways to use the limited artwork we had."

Despite limitations, Justin found realising the world of *Shadowrun* on the SNES rather frustrating, lamenting, "We were always under the pump on *Shadowrun*, and lots of parts of the game were thrown together, cut out, or bodged together! We were always running out of memory, and we begged the publisher for a 12 megabit cartridge but they wouldn't commit to the extra memory. So, the artists would be constantly revising all of their artwork to reduce the character counts. That's why the helicopter at the volcano is viewed front-on, as we could flip the left and right sides, and why all of the baddies have the same corpse..." Though *Shadowrun* did have a number of its character and enemy sprites downgraded which impacted the game's intended visual flair, Justin is eager to call both the actual engine and the in-game tools "fantastic."

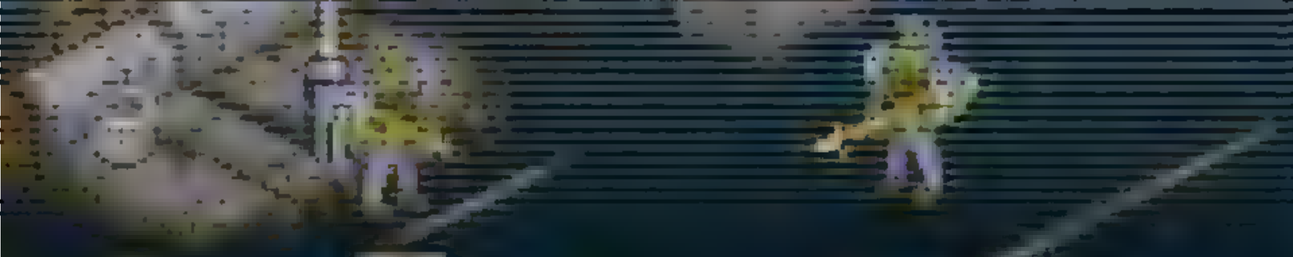
> **"I wanted to do a good job for my fellow RPG fans"**

IN THE FILM

PUBLISHER: DATA EAST
DEVELOPER: BEAM SOFTWARE, LASER BEAM
RELEASED: 1993
PLATFORM: SNES
GENRE: ACTION-RPG

Being one of two programmers behind the project, and also responsible for architectural design and the PC tools which allowed the building of the worlds, Andrew explains how he and his fellow programmer worked their way around certain graphical limitations.

"The SNES did not provide an arbitrary bitmap rendering system as is common today, but used a system of character generators and sprites," he begins. "This meant the backgrounds had to be built on a rigid 64 by 32 grid of eight by eight cells. The hardware provided three layers with which characters (implemented using sprites) could move, but this wasn't enough. We used a special hardware trick called 'sprite masking' which was actually a hardware bug that let us cut holes in sprites where the characters were, so we could make a sprite appear to go behind a pillar for example. This required a complex database, so the PC tool allowed designers to construct levels from modular parts from the artists and build 3D information (floor is flat, wall is upright etc). The levels would then be compiled into a single database so that all the graphic information could be shared in a virtual character set. The runtime building of the levels from this database was written by Darren Bremner, all in glorious assembler code." Additionally, Andrew goes on to elaborate on how the game was put together. "All the game systems were written in assembler code, and most other



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

THE MUNCHER
SYSTEMS: C64, ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1988

THE WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1985

THE HOBBIT
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1982

games for the SNES were completely written in assembler code. There was little use of languages such as C, due partly to the little runtime RAM available. There was only 128K of RAM into which [we could] decompress art and audio, as well as run the game and its logic. However, we didn't want to have to write all the game logic in Assembler, it would be too error-prone and tedious. As other languages were heavy on RAM usage we designed our own language, which we compiled to a virtual stack-based code that the runtime code would interpret and execute. The language was designed so the compiler could pre-compute the exact workspace size (or stack) a script would need down to the byte, so the runtime could allocate exactly the space required (a concept I learnt from work with transputers). This let us run multiple scripts for all the characters in a scene in very little space, a few K. I wrote the compiler and Darren wrote the runtime.

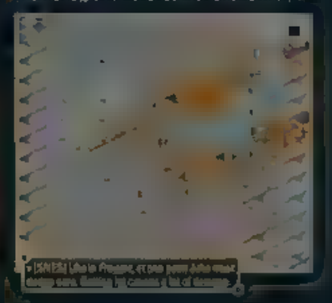
As far as citing inspiration for *Shadowrun* beyond its obvious source material, all three developers come to the same conclusion – William Gibson's classic 1984 cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer*, the novel that defined the cyberpunk genre. Justin elaborates, while also mentioning another somewhat unlikely source of inspiration, "There's a huge amount of *Neuromancer* in *Shadowrun*, as there was in all of the cyberpunk genre. The other influence that players have probably noticed was *Minesweeper*, the time-killing puzzler that shipped with Windows. When it came to the hacking mini-game, no one could think of how to do it until someone came up with the idea of using *Minesweeper's* mechanics for the hacking."

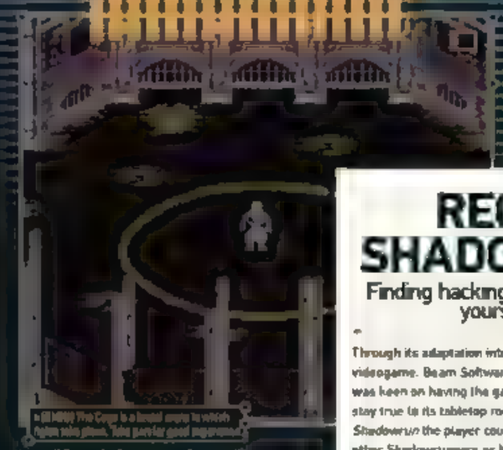
Beyond the cyberpunk city setting, the player also had the ability to enter the 'Matrix', a virtual world within *Shadowrun*

possible using a cyberdeck. Created primarily by Graeme Scott, it was presented in the visually stylised way the main game and featured a new style of gameplay to emphasise the gulf between the real world and the virtual cyberspace. Paul notes, "We had to keep it as simple as possible, given the time constraints and the memory constraints of the machine." Yet despite talk of the system's shortcomings to a certain degree, Andrew was quite confident that it could handle *Shadowrun*. He recalls, "The SNES was a great machine, especially after working on its predecessor the NES. Its very non-orthogonal hardware always made it a challenge on how to design a game around it. It was probably the most powerful graphic chip of its type, even compared to the AGB. It not only had a CPU whose speed was measured in the low MHz but a host of special DMA tricks (giving us the famous Mode 7) and excellent audio that, for the first time, allowed a musician to actually compose real music for a videogame. Overall, the SNES allowed us to deliver a console game which, for the time, didn't have to compromise on its quality due to hardware limitations."

> **Arthur did what he loved best, and that was game design**

However, there is one side to this story that will never be told again, and that is the first-hand account of Arthur Kalaunis, project manager and additional game designer on the project. Arthur Kalaunis passed away in September 2012, and the man who was known as 'Artie' to some of his friends is sadly missed and not forgotten. Justin reflects: "Arthur was a great friend, especially during *Shadowrun*. He was the sort of producer and designer who put everything into the game, and made it a pleasure to work on. We'd go out at 11pm for Slurpees for the team, and head to Pizza Hut every Tuesday for all-you-can-eat pizza. Unfortunately, he was born with a heart defect and had open-heart surgery when he was around 20. Last year his heart finally gave out and he died." Paul also chimes in with his thoughts on the passing of a friend, telling us, "Arthur was a deeply serious and dedicated guy. What I loved about him was that you could just discuss an idea with him and let him go – he'd work away at it and something good would result." Andrew also shares his memories, and believes that *Shadowrun*





meant quite a lot to Arthur. "Naturally I was deeply shocked and upset with Arthur's passing last year, as Arthur joined myself and Trevor Newton as co-owner of Beam Entertainment over one-and-a-half decades ago. This was compounded by the fact I was on the other side of the world and couldn't attend his funeral. On *Shadowrun* Arthur did what he loved best, and that was game design. I believe he would have remembered [it] as one of the best projects he worked on."

A year after Beam Software released *Shadowrun*, another *Shadowrun* title hit the shelves, this time developed by Illusion Software for the Sega Mega Drive, which was then followed by a Japanese take on the franchise in 1996 by Compile. It seems Beam Software hit a timely nerve but, despite a fantastic critical response to its *Shadowrun*, a direct sequel never materialised. In fact, despite a post-credits message promising a sequel, the team were adamant that it was never seriously discussed. Andrew does interject with a revealing story though, "The Japanese version was interesting. This was because it came to be proposed after we had finished the English version, and we were presented by the Japanese publisher with a big printout where they had reverse-engineered the VRAM (graphic memory) for all the different screens, working out where the Japanese font could be fitted in. While it was an impressive piece of work, we didn't have the heart to tell them it was useless. This highlighted a difference between how we in the West (or South for Beam) worked differently to the East. While they allocated the space for the art by hand, we wrote systems to do this in code, so we simply added the Japanese font to a table and it was done."

As these three developers reminisce about their game, we had to ask, are there any secrets in *Shadowrun* that no one knows about? Surprisingly, two of them speak up. James lays out what hasn't been discovered for 20 years, saying "There is a cheat in the game, but I can't remember exactly how to do it. Basically, there is a flickering streetlight in the first street area after you wake up in the morgue. If you examine the Matchbox four times around the flickering light, you're teleported to a cheat room that contains a bunch of upgrades and gives access to all of the levels." However, Andrew also jumps in with an alternate take on it all: "There is a cheat in the game, in the form of a secret area around a lamppost in the main square that was put in for QA. I wish I could remember the actual cheat, but it is now 20 years ago." Confirming accounts, certainly, but now a secret kept explored by the entire gaming public.

20 years on, *Shadowrun* remains one of the SNES's strongest and most memorable Western titles, and certainly its best RPG. It contained a wonderful narrative, a gorgeous cyberpunk-laden setting and two diverse and interesting gameplay together in one neat little package. Looking back, how do these developers view their work?

"I actually really like what we did," Paul remarks, "As other people produced games in following years, I could see the influence of *Shadowrun* through many of them."

Justin also backs up Paul's feelings on the game, saying, "I'm still amazed we actually finished the game! We were a young team and were fortunate to be given the opportunity to work on a game that went on to become a minor classic!" Andrew on the other hand simply commends the efforts of all involved, intimating, "I regard *Shadowrun* as one of the best projects I have worked on. I think this is mainly because the entire team was really into the game and the concept and went that extra mile on each aspect of the game – design, art, scriptwriters and QA." It would appear that Hairbrained Schemes' new *Shadowrun* game has a lot to live up to.

RECRUITING SHADOWRUNNERS

Finding hacking too difficult? You need to get yourself some friends...

Through its adaptation into a videogame, Beam Software was keen on having the game stay true to its tabletop roots. In *Shadowrun* the player could hire other Shadowrunners as backup throughout the game. They could be found in the many dingy bars of Seattle, and if a Shadowrunner died, they re-spawned back at where you hired them. Hiring a Shadowrunner was a simple affair that could be done without the penalty of losing a potential ally forever. This addition of building up a team paid homage to the group-style gameplay of the tabletop RPG. The number that could be hired, and the length of time that they could stay with you, was dictated by the player's Charisma level; if your level was higher, you could save money on Shadowrunner hires. Additionally, there was one ally that would try and kill the player resulting in quite an unexpected confrontation for unaware players.

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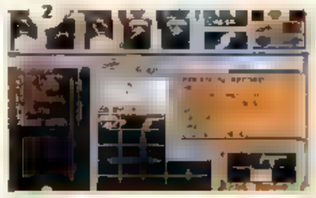
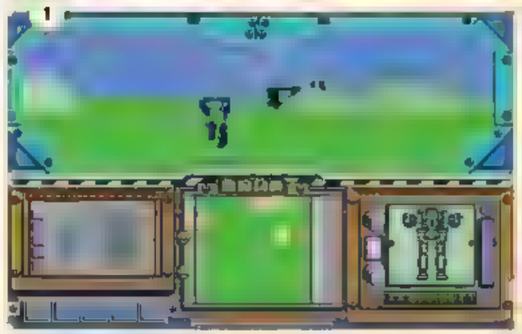
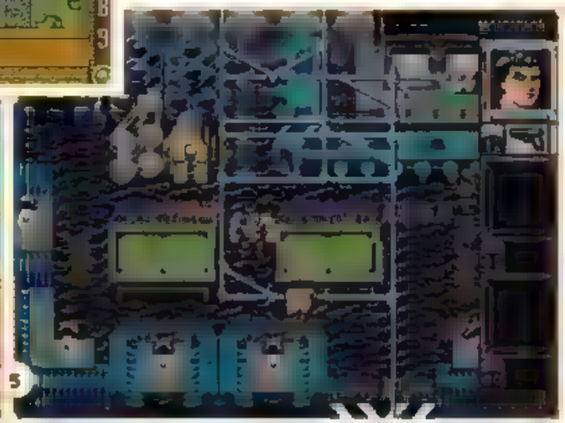
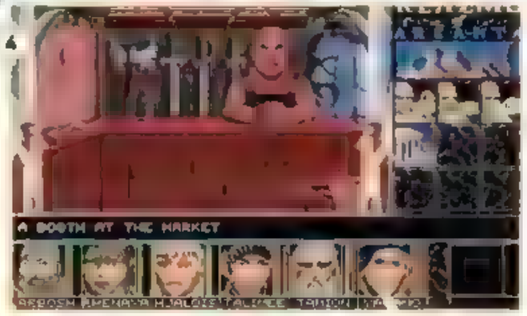
FROM TABLE TO COMPUTER

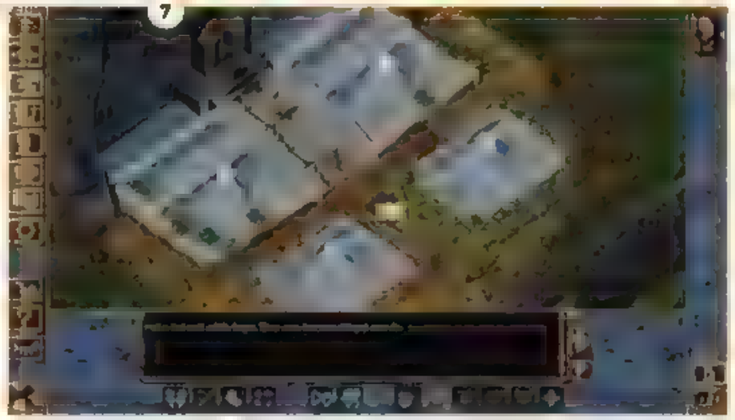
More classic RPGs that became fully-fledged videogames

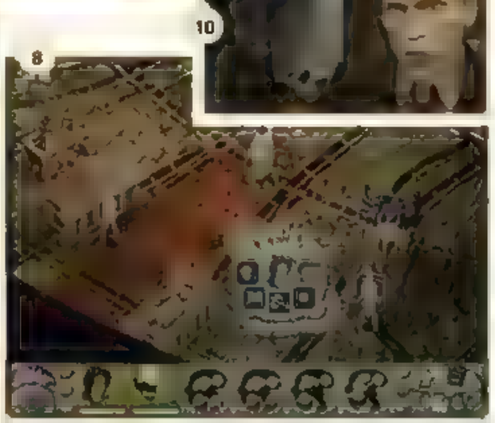












MECHWARRIOR

DEVELOPER: DYNAMIX
PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION
SYSTEM: MS-DOS, SHARP X68000
YEAR: 1989

1 *MechWarrior*, based upon the tabletop RPG of the same name, which is part of the *BattleTech* franchise, placed the player within the cockpit of a hulking mech, something that was quite interesting and new back in 1986. Despite the title, *MechWarrior* had much more to offer than standard mech-on-mech combat. Based around quite an impressive reputation system, the player could build relationships with the five Great Houses that could lead to opening up more missions to partake in. Spawning a whole slew of sequels and spin-offs, *MechWarrior* games have arguably become even more popular than their tabletop RPG source material.

MEGATRAVELLER 1: THE ZHODANI CONSPIRACY

DEVELOPER: PARAGON SOFTWARE
PUBLISHER: IN-HOUSE
SYSTEM: AMIGA, ATARI ST, MS-DOS
YEAR: 1990

2 Based on the tabletop RPG *Traveller*, this overlooked title gave the player a wonderful sense of freedom, despite receiving mixed reviews upon release. The player takes command of five adventurers as they try and save their civilisation, the Imperium, from the alien race known as the Zhodani. Containing eight solar systems and 28 planets to visit, *MegaTraveller 1*'s world is vast and interesting. While combat is lacking at times and some elements of its source material are missing, it does not take away from how innovative and daring this was for its time.

SPACE: 1889

DEVELOPER: PARAGON SOFTWARE
PUBLISHER: MICROPROSE SOFTWARE INC
SYSTEM: AMIGA, ATARI, MS-DOS
YEAR: 1990

3 Here's one that has gone under the radar for many. In *Space: 1889* you create five unique characters from scratch and set out on an epic adventure. Set in an alternate 19th Century Victorian era that has already discovered space travel, the game takes the familiar and has a little fun – the merging of history and sci-fi is rather interesting and plays out exceptionally well as you encounter historic characters such as Jules Verne, Jack the Ripper and Rasputin, but with a twist. With the addition of being able to purchase spaceships on top of the familiar RPG formula, *Space: 1889* is an undiscovered gem.

REALMS OF ARKANIA: BLADE OF DESTINY

DEVELOPER: ATTIC ENTERTAINMENT SOFTWARE
PUBLISHER: US GOLD
SYSTEM: AMIGA, MS-DOS
YEAR: 1996

4 Though this year sees a remake of it, the original *Realms Of Arkania: Blade Of Destiny* – which is the first title in the *Sir Rhandir Trilogy* – should not be overlooked. Based upon the tabletop RPG *The Dark Eye*, the game is steeped heavily in lore and, in turn, does a great job at world building. Taking command of six characters, the player navigates through beautifully constructed 3D environments and battles fierce enemies. Complete with rather in-depth character customisation and a superbly detailed isometric battle view, *Realms Of Arkania: Blade Of Destiny* is a terrific start to a highly enjoyable trilogy.

SHADOWRUN

DEVELOPER: BLUESKY SOFTWARE
PUBLISHER: SEGA
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1994

5 One year after Beam Software released its superb SNES adaptation of *Shadowrun*, Blue Sky Software released its own take on the franchise. While it comes from the very same source material, it is a rather different beast compared to its Super Nintendo counterpart. With a fully customisable player character right from the start, a cracking narrative, accessible combat and a wonderful portrayal of the Matrix (which is arguably better than that of the SNES game), this is yet another excellent vision of the tabletop role-playing game. It takes a slightly different approach, but some might make a case for it being the superior adaptation of its source material.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: TOWER OF DOOM

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
PUBLISHER: IN-HOUSE
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1994

6 Leave it to Capcom to take the *Dungeons & Dragons* franchise and turn it into a side-scrolling fighter. But you know what? It works, and it works amazingly well. Despite its odd choice of genre and a focus on fast, intense action, *Tower Of Doom* retains some of the hallmarks of a classic *Dungeons & Dragons* experience. Playable with up to four characters which include the – fighter, Dwarf, Cleric and Elf, and containing a massive array of attacks, actions and spells, *Tower Of Doom* is a surprisingly fresh and enjoyable approach to the series. It spawned its own sequel, *Shadow Over Mystara*. It's now available on Xbox 360, PS3 and PC.

BALDUR'S GATE

DEVELOPER: BIOWARE
PUBLISHER: BLACK ISLE STUDIOS, INTERPLAY ENTERTAINMENT
SYSTEM: PC, MAC OS
YEAR: 1998

7 *Baldur's Gate* is often listed as one of the greatest true RPG experiences to date, taking place within the Forgotten Realms, one of the many *D&D* universes. *Baldur's Gate* is an in-depth and story-driven game for players who seek true adventure, boasting an excellent dialogue system and diverse party-based combat. *Baldur's Gate* is actually based on *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons 2nd Edition* rules, it is an utter treat for players and non-players of *Dungeons & Dragons* alike and spawned a direct sequel, a number of expansions and a spin-off – or many. It is the starting point for those wishing to enter the world of *D&D*.

PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

DEVELOPER: BLACK ISLE STUDIOS
PUBLISHER: INTERPLAY ENTERTAINMENT
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1999

8 For many gamers, *Torment* is the best Western RPG of all time, and it's easy to understand why once you become involved in its rich story. Helmed by Chris Avellone, the game placed the player in the role of The Nameless One, an immortal that has lived countless lives, yet forgotten them all. Through exploring the city of Sigil, The Nameless One must reclaim memories of his past lives. With a focus on narrative instead of combat, *Planescape: Torment* is a treat for the gamer weary of cheap thrills. Thought provoking and wonderfully realised, it is a must play, constantly maturing with each subsequent playthrough.

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

DEVELOPER: BIOWARE
PUBLISHER: INFOGRAMES
SYSTEM: WINDOWS, LINUX, MAC OS X
YEAR: 2002

9 *Neverwinter Nights* was named after the original game of the same name by Stormfront Studios in 1991, which was the first graphical massively multiplayer online role-playing game ever. Whereas Bioware based *Baldur's Gate* on *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons 2nd Edition* rules, *Neverwinter Nights* used *3rd Edition* rules. It also boasted slick graphics that brought the world of the Forgotten Realms to life like never before and intuitive combat that kept gameplay fun and smart. *Neverwinter Nights* is one of the best trips through the world of *Dungeons & Dragons*, with a range of excellent creation tools for making your own role-playing adventures.

VAMPIRE THE MASQUERADE – BLOODLINES

DEVELOPER: TROIKA GAMES
PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION
SYSTEM: WINDOWS
YEAR: 2004

10 Set within the universe of *World Of Darkness* by White Wolf Publishing, *Vampire The Masquerade – Bloodlines* begins with the death of the main character, only to be resurrected as a vampire. The player begins by choosing between multiple vampire clans, each with their own powers, personality and ability to steer the story in different ways. From there the player views Los Angeles from the eyes of vampire, completing missions across the city while along the way keeping up the Masquerade – a vampire law that prevents the human world from knowing about their very existence. A truly wonderful and atmospheric title.

A MOMENT WITH...

Burke Trieschmann

Composer of such classics such as Pandemonium, The Unholy War and The Horde, Burke Trieschmann speaks to Denis Murphy about his two decades' worth of work in the business

Who is Burke Trieschmann?

[illegible]

Why did you start composing videogames?
Doing music and sound for games came about as a natural progression of following the music in my life and whatever studio I came up along the way. I've always had an interest in learning and playing new instruments and also the technology behind recording and creating music.

How do you approach your work?
Before composing music or any sort of sound design, it's important to find a common language to communicate with the game designers and producers at the beginning of the project so it's clear what's needed, what style best compliments the gameplay and how many assets (variations, interactive functionality, etc) will need to be created to get you there. Usually a well-designed game will have an Audio Design document as well.

PlayStation: Pandemonium featured a great score that spine-tingled its fans – and inspired them to [illegible]

What were you trying to achieve with your *Pandemonium* score?
Pandemonium was a very organic score. I tried to incorporate a more traditional and Celtic feel into the music that was fun, bouncy and subversive at the same time. One challenge was that the PlayStation needed to have the music bits in memory and triggered by small sequence files at run time. My goal was to take as many real performances of musicians playing traditional instruments and cut them up into smaller sampled bits that could be re-triggered by the sequence files to make variations of music. In effect, I was creating a musical instrument patched to work with and stay within the memory restrictions of the PSone – that is, only using single instrument samples but also both an oboe/uilleann pipe, percussion, mandolin, violin riffs and phrases that could give some life and flee to the soundtrack.

Was *Pandemonium 3* ever planned?
The team that developed *Pandemonium 2* moved on to start another company, and Crystal Dynamics did not pursue another *Pandemonium*. I think a lot of focus was on other titles that they had been developing.

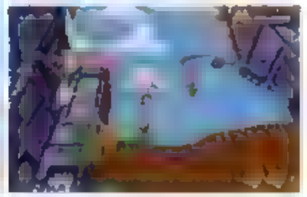
PlayStation: Known as SE *Pandemonium* featured 2D graphics but was played using a 3D plane. The game also used a real-time 3D model and 3D sprites

What's been your most enjoyable project to date?
Oh, so many. It's hard to decide just one. The early soundtracks for *The Horde*, both *Pandemoniums* and *The Unholy War* were quite challenging and fun.

And what's your dream project?
One that is designed from the ground up to support high-end music and audio as an interactive, immersive and evolving score that both reacted to the game state and the game's state would react seamlessly to the music. Having the player be able to make music inside the game and save the results of their creative decisions. A game engine that could support high-end DSP effects on the fly, unlimited audio memory, surround support and a broader set of requirements that could be used for scoring and creating sound effects. A game that was musically reactive and configurable to the player's style, emotional reactions and gameplay decisions. There are games out there that have come close to this, and as consoles and computers get more powerful, the audio will continue to improve.

However, I do think success in game music should not be [illegible] to itself, but instead compliment and raise the gameplay experience to a higher level.

PlayStation: While the music in gameplay terms is to be predominant, *Pandemonium 2*'s soundtrack was mostly [illegible] and [illegible] Burke found [illegible] scoring



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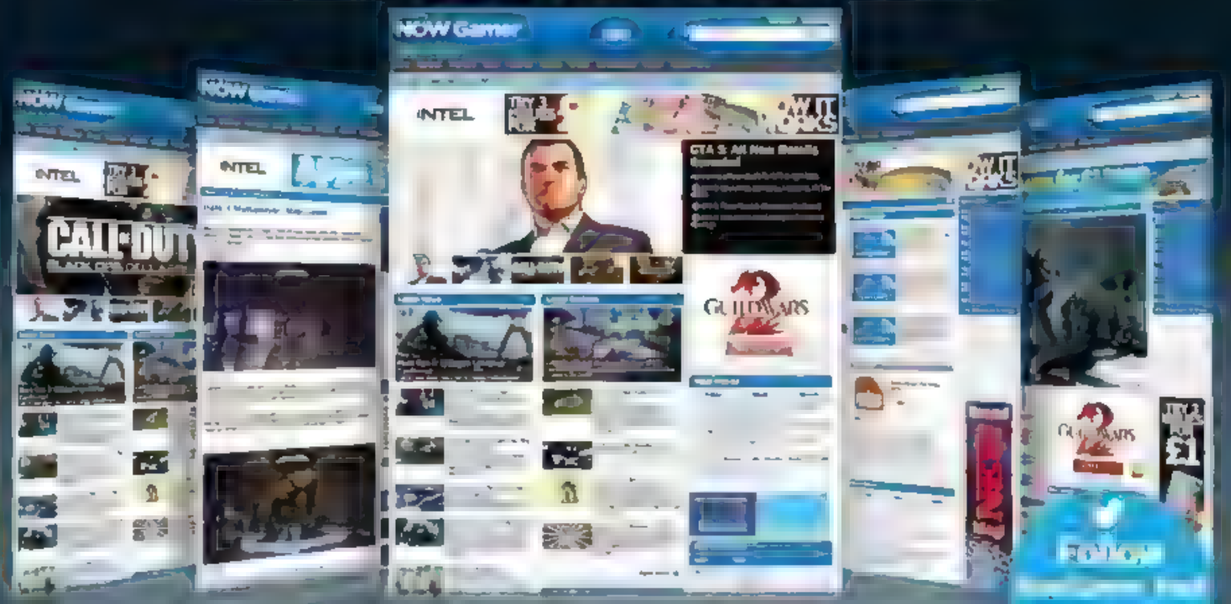

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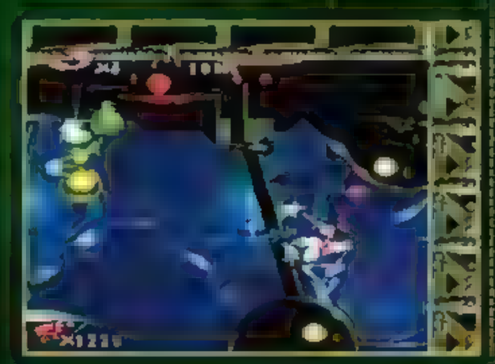
THE STORY OF EARTHWORM JIM

FIENDISH CHIPPER, EVIL LAWYERS AND LOTS OF COWS: IT CAN ONLY MEAN AN ADVENTURE STARRING EARTHWORM JIM, KIM WILDE FINDS OUT HOW AN ORDINARY WORM TRANSFORMED INTO SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY

Some stories start from a seed of an idea, a plot device that is then used to create a magical world. Others germinate from the existence of one character, who then goes on to shape the world and everything around it. With *Earthworm Jim*, it was the character that first sprang to life and went on to influence the nature of the game that he would star in.

"It's a long story, but I came up with Jim in November of 1993 when I was out the door with Virgin Games," says Doug TenNapel, designer of *Earthworm Jim* and his cast. "I was at home in my little Irvine apartment and Shiny was just starting up. I remember drawing while listening to Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours* and I created Jim and a number of the villains in about 45 minutes! He came out pretty much [as] he is today, a goofy looking worm in a muscular super suit. I did a profile walk cycle of him because I was trying to get the job of animator. I didn't expect we would do a *Jim* game at that point. It was more a demonstration that I could animate and create for them in a pinch.



> "When Dan Castanella turned up to do Jim's voice over there was a revered hush across the room."
> KIDS EXPRESS

Jim would still evolve and change as the team developed the game, but the main character was all there."

At the time, Playmates Interactive Entertainment, specialists within the field of toy figures and cartoons, had seen the success of *Sonic The Hedgehog* and decided to become involved with a new videogame franchise which would then lead on to produce its own line of toys and cartoons. Playmates teamed up with Shiny Entertainment – which had already proven its skill with *Global Gladiators*, *Cool Spot* and *Aladdin* – and commissioned it with the task. The arrival of Doug gave Shiny Entertainment the opportunity it was looking for.

"This was early on in Shiny's life, they were pricing photocopiers and building out office space and an animation position opened up when one of the original team didn't work out," continues Doug. "I remember that they were trying to get *Day Of The Tentacle*'s Larry Ahern to sign on and he didn't have much interest. A number of other lucky moments came up that kept that door open to me. I was good friends with Mike Dietz and Ed Schofield, the other two main animators at Shiny. They wanted me but weren't going to just throw me the job. In the end, the final taste test was going to be with Dave Perry. He was also at my original job interview at Virgin Games just four months earlier so he'd seen my hit-and-miss portfolio. I think EWJ, in combination with Mike Dietz's recommendation, pushed me over the edge." With Earthworm Jim came an assorted cast of villains. "When I initially made EWJ in that 45 minute period, I know that Psy-Crow, Major Mucus, Peter Puppy and Professor Tick-For-A-Head (later known as Professor Monkey-For-A-Head) were done in that session."

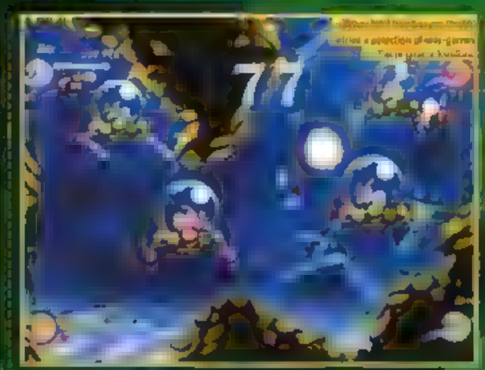
With a hero and villains drawn, it was time to create a game around them and a story. Earthworm Jim was an ordinary worm until he encountered a space suit that fell from the sky, bestowing him with superhero abilities. However, the evil Psy-Crow and his cohorts were intent on retrieving the suit at all costs so it was down to Jim to protect his new found abilities while also saving Princess What's-Her-Name from their hands, an enigmatic nameless character whom Jim was madly in love with. When asked why the lead was a worm, Doug explains he's a fan of the underdog. "I was looking for a way to make a weak character have the opportunity to be strong. That's Elliot from *ET* or Marty McFly from *Back To The Future*. These are underdogs who are given an opportunity to be bigger. I was specifically studying Warner Bros characters because their personalities were so identifiable and comedic."

What makes *Earthworm Jim* stand out is the quality of the animation, reminiscent of early Chuck Jones and Tex Avery cartoons. Much like their inspirations, each sprite was painstakingly hand

drawn and then re-drawn as artwork on cells before scanning them into the computer. The same approach was used for the beautiful backgrounds that feature throughout all the levels, with many having slopes and twists to give the feel of a 3D environment. The emphasis on hand-drawn animation meant that artists were needed to conjure up the world.

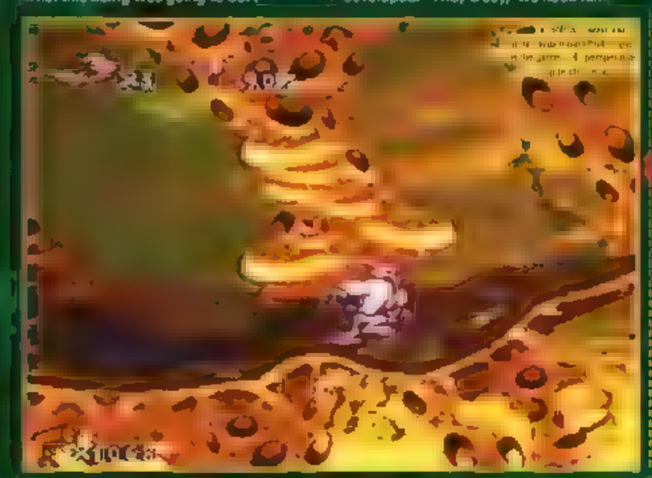
"I remember the days when I used to do all the art on graph paper, one pixel at a time," says Dave Perry, programmer and designer of *Earthworm Jim* and its sequel. "That was actually a great time, as it allowed really rubbish artists (like myself) to survive! Once things really started animating my cover was blown, and over the following years non-artists (like me) had to put down their pencils and concede. We brought in the big guns (Nick Bruty was my partner for years), and at Virgin we had their core animation team lead by Mike Dietz and he at one point even used Disney Feature Animators for our *Aladdin* game! Definitely not a fair fight for an average animator. For gamers, all that mattered was they wanted to see amazing graphics, fluid motion and be entertained. I think top level artists/animators became a requirement and we never went back. I loved that time as I learned so much about animation from your guys."

Although Dave Perry and his team were responsible for programming and designing, Doug was allowed to contribute to the overall style of the game, a rare opportunity for the animator. "I was given the role of saying what the character would or wouldn't do. It wasn't official or anything, but I generally got to decide who he was, while the team described what this being was going to do. I remember Nick Bruty was creating the Hellish looking level, and that triggered an opportunity for me to make Evil the Cat the main bad guy. There would be experimentation and give-and-take on anything directed to me. We universally chasing the same goal of making a great game and trying to cram it all into this impossibly small cartridge!"



"Jim arrived in the sweet spot of the Sega generation and it won lots of 'Game of the Year' awards" DAVE PERRY

The different vehicles that Earthworm Jim encountered throughout his adventures, from rockets to the bathysphere, came about as the game developed. "They'd say, 'we need him to ride a rocket', and I drew an airplane engine. It had to be small as the sprite didn't take up much room, as Jim's main vehicle wasn't something I came up with from the start, but now we can't imagine Jim without it," continues Doug.



Earthworm Jim was released in 1994 on the Sega Mega Drive, with a version to follow on the Super Nintendo in 1995. The SNES release has the better visual style of the two, with extra background scrolling for the levels and animations for the characters, but is missing the 'Intestinal Distress' level of the Mega Drive game due to the latter having better compression abilities to store more levels. A Sega CD and Windows 95 'Special Edition' were also released, adding a new level, 'Big Bruty', improving the animations with additional frames and [illegible] with bonus extras.

[illegible] reading of handheld versions, Mega as well, but were developed by a different company. Eurocom released a Game Boy version that left out many of the levels of the original and [illegible] with poor controls, [illegible] a Game Gear release which was a re-coloured version of the Game Boy game but with choppier gameplay and with the almost impossible to control. The Game Boy Advance version fared better, although it looked the part, Earthworm Jim was slow and unresponsive to control, making it hard to travel across the large levels.

With *Earthworm Jim* proving to be a hit with gamers and critics alike, a sequel followed and, although not as memorable as the original, was still a zany, enjoyable adventure. Earthworm Jim was this time accompanied by Snot, his green slimy friend, who could be used as a parachute and help him swing from surface to surface. Although still a run-and-gun platformer it contained plenty of variety, from having to rescue Peter's nephews from being tossed out of a window to playing a blind salamander culminating in a quiz at the end of the level.

The sequel also received ports for PlayStation, Saturn and PC in 1996. The former releases added 3D introductions and ending sequences but didn't try and improve on the originals, while the PC

games featured upgraded graphics and audio but was missing the 'Lorenzo's Soil' level. While North America and Europe saw the Saturn release, only Europe received the PlayStation conversion. Once again the game would receive a Game Boy Advance port much later in 2002, but suffered from the same problems of the original with poor controls and slow character movement.

Dave Perry felt that *Earthworm Jim's* growing appeal was also a question of timing. "Jim arrived in the sweet spot of the Sega generation and it won lots of 'Game Of The Year' awards. It was at the right place at the right time. I feel we were very lucky (that) we started when we did. My personal opinion is that the character had an interesting trait of being both weak (a worm) and strong (a suit). By combining the two it opens the door to crazy/funny things to him."

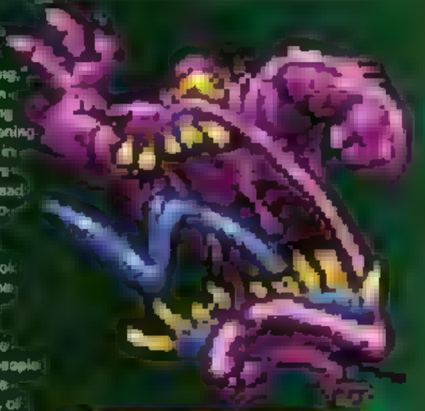
Inevitably the late Nineties ushered in an era of 3D platformers, so it was only a matter of time before *Earthworm Jim* would make the leap into a new dimension. Shiny Entertainment had been purchased by Interplay in 1996 and the idea for a 3D game came about. Although Shiny Entertainment had started work on *MDK* and new development team VIS Interactive took on our spineless hero, Dave Perry and the team were initially consulted on the character's new direction. "After they commissioned us to produce the game, I was one of the team sent to Shiny Entertainment to work with Dave Perry and the creatives to come up with the concept for the new version," recalls Kirk Ewing, director for *Earthworm Jim 3D*.

Yet the jump from 2D to 3D proved to be far trickier than anticipated, and the introduction of a new development team proved to be a sore point. "It was a nightmare, our pencil artists had no experience on 3D packages and Interplay let another team make the 3D game, which our guys were just hating," remembers David. "We were stuck in no-man's land; the industry was going 3D, but all our expertise was 2D, meaning really 2D, with pencils and colouring in hand-drawn cells. The core animators never made the transition to 3D, instead they switched to Clay and continue to work on clay (stop-motion) today."

It was also difficult to decide just how *Earthworm Jim* was going to look in 3D, and this proved to be one of the many reasons why the game was in development limbo for three years. "Projects like this are really difficult to manage and there's an awful lot of people with an opinion to add to the mix; the publisher, the IP owner, the fans and, of course, us—the developers," continues Kirk. "I remember, for instance, that the finished 3D model of Jim went through at least eight iterations before we found something that everyone agreed on. There were also a lot of heritage elements that just didn't translate as well into 3D (the head whip for instance). A lot of time was spent working with these things to try and make them satisfying, not always with a satisfactory outcome. *Earthworm Jim 3D* was my first experience of working on an original sequel to an existing mega-property and from 2D into 3D as well. It wasn't easy for anybody."

As a result of its prolonged development process, there were plenty of ideas that never made the final cut. "I still have drawers full of sketches for levels and bad guys for that game," laments Kirk. "My biggest regret is that we didn't get more of the original cast in there in cooler ways. I'm not doing it again. We got to make *Earthworm Kim* though, just like we said we would in the first meeting."

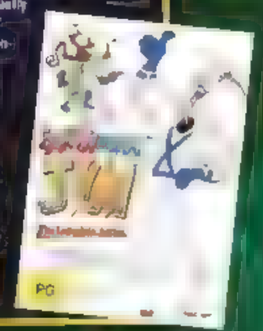
Although a difficult game to work on, there were still some memorable moments. "My absolute favourite thing



LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

If you were a popular videogame character in the Nineties then it was only a matter of time before you ended up with your own TV series. Like Mario and Sonic before him, Earthworm Jim ended up on the silver screen in 1995. Out of respect for the franchise, Universal involved Earthworm Jim's creator throughout the whole process. "I had limited approvals of the script and I designed some of the secondary new characters that showed up in each episode," explains Doug about his involvement. "Universal invited me to participate in every aspect of that show, which is pretty rare. They even started voluntarily paying me when they weren't contractually obliged to do so."

Due to the cartoon-[illegible] of the character, Earthworm Jim and his fellow comrades translated well into the medium of television and delivered many crazy adventures in 26 episodes, spread across two seasons.



3D WOES

Other popular characters that struggled with the move to 3D

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

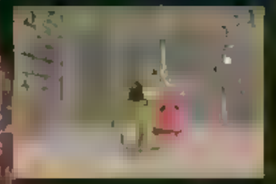
Although the *Sonic Adventure* and *Sonic Heroes* series were decent platform titles, they were plagued with underpinning camera angles. Sonic's later escapades in *Sonic The Hedgehog* on Xbox 360 were less than impressive and *Sonic Unleashed* was passable when not forcing you to play in 3D, proving that some characters need to stay in the second dimension.

SHADOW THE HEDGEHOG

The darker nemesis of Sonic the Hedgehog may have fared well in the *Adventure* series, but when the time came for him to star in his own game things didn't quite go to plan. An ill-advised decision to equip the [illegible] decide whether to be good or evil led to a fragmented experience marred with clumsy controls.

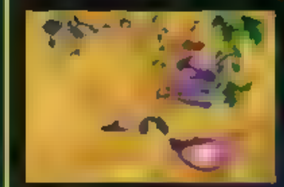
MICKEY MOUSE

Once the glittering stars of the [illegible] series and the enjoyable *Mickey's Wild Adventure*, [illegible] the 3D world with *Epic Mickey*. The first game was full of nice ideas but struggled with a tricky camera, while the recent sequel failed to build on the original's concept. Hopefully the *Castle Of Illusion* remake will be a return to form for Mickey.



FROGGER

As a game that was never conceived as a platformer, the decision to make [illegible] extremely strange use of the franchise and didn't fare well at all. *Frogger's Great Quest* (it really wasn't) and *Ancient Shadow* were past shenanigans for the franchise, and even 3D remakes of the original 2D idea lose something in translation.



MALICE

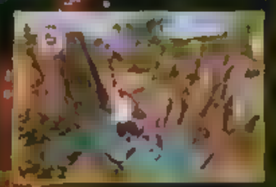
One of those titles that was in development hell for years – eventually switching from one generation to another – Malice's *Sabot* struggled with poor level design, very forgettable [illegible] and, once again, a dynamic camera that was very difficult to [illegible] It wasn't a bad game, but definitely to add to an otherwise overcrowded genre.

PITFALL HARRY

Pitfall Harry entered the difficult third dimension in the *Lost Expedition* and the *Big Adventure*, which were passable if not all that memorable platform-style games. To his credit, Indiana-inspired fractured rage stalking and plenty of trap dodging which were a couple of the trademarks of the series from its stellar 8-bit era during the Eighties.

BUBSY

While he was never going to threaten Sonic's crown, Bubsy's first outing on the Sega Mega Drive was a solid little time-waster with its own identity. Competing with the release of *Super Mario 64* was never going to be easy, but the release of *Bubsy 3D* showcased a world of poor controls, terrible camera work and repetitive visuals. Sorry Bubs.

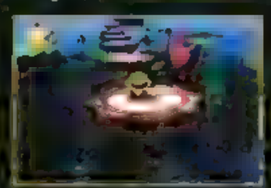


TEJAN AND EARL

The funky alien duo crashed onto the Sega Mega Drive in several groovy adventures and eventually made the leap to 3D on the Xbox. Despite a valiant attempt to build on the original gamers' enjoyable concepts, *Tonjon And Earl III: Mission To Earth* received a mixed reception from critics and fans and attained poor sales [illegible] upon release.

KID THE KANGAROO

As heroes go, a boxing kangaroo is certainly a little different to the normal platform character, but [illegible] he still struggles to stand out from the crowd. While his [illegible] sold admirably, despite being fairly average, the sequel didn't fare as well and failed to endear him to platform videogame fans.



PAC-MAN

[illegible] chased by ghosts, Pac-Man decided to give the 3D platform gig a try and with mixed results. The *Pac-Man World* series had some nice ideas but struggled with camera issues. Ironically, the hidden 2D mazes are the highlight over the main adventure, proving that sometimes the original ideas are best.

CRASH BANDICOOT

The mischievous bandicoot captured hearts with the PlayStation games, but future releases in the form of *Twinsanity*, *Crash Of The Titans* and *Mind Over Mutant* on fully-fledged 3D games had mixed results. As videogame icons go, he is still a family favourite and will no doubt reappear [illegible]

CARMEN SANDIEGO AND REMINGTON SANDERS

[illegible] Carmen and Remington sanded the vampire hitting brilliant ground down by the Difficulty. After *Super Castlevania IV*, this game on N64 struggled with control and camera problems and was a disappointment to critics and fans. The recent *Castlevania* on Xbox 360 and PS3 fared much better.

[illegible] was working with the voice talent, explains Kirk. "When Dan Castanella turned up to do Jim's voiceover there was a revered hush across the room. Not for long though, he's nuts!"

As examples of 3D games go, there were certainly worse ones on the market and, while the game had its problems with difficult controls, an unresponsive camera and fairly ordinary level design, it did a decent job at retaining the off-the-wall humour the series was renowned for. When it comes down to why Earthworm Jim floundered in 3D, Kirk admits that it was never meant for the character. "Earthworm Jim was designed as a 2D character from the outset – everything about it; the backdrops, the animations, the supporting characters, all existed in an insane 2D world and some elements just could not be convincingly translated into the 3D Wormiverse. This meant a lot of rethinks on what was going to work. If I'd really had my way back then I'd have made it look/work more like *Abe's Oddysee*."

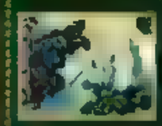
Understandably, the game received a mixed reception among gamers. The fan-base and critics struggled with the unresponsive camera and felt it was average and uninspiring, especially when competing with high profile games such as *Rayman 2* and *Super Mario 64*. Despite everything, Kirk Ewing feels the criticism was fair. "It wasn't as good as it should have been. I loved the first games and I wanted it to be better. You take criticism in context of what was possible and try to learn from your mistakes. That said, I've given the game to [illegible] lot of younger kids since then and they've really liked it. Little kids are stupid like that."

Yet 3D wasn't the only problem that Earthworm Jim had to contend with. He was also the star of a side-scrolling platformer for the Game Boy Color called *Earthworm Jim 2: Menace 2 The Galaxy* in 1999. Once again the game lacked the inventiveness of its predecessors and focused more on collecting coins than platforming. Awkward controls and poor level design meant it was an experience better left on the shelves.

After Earthworm Jim's ill-fated dalliance with the third dimension, it was time for our hero to hang up his space suit and burrow underground, resurfacing occasionally to cameo as a secret character for *Battle Arena Toshinden* (PC) and a playable fighter in *Clayfighter 63 1/3*. There were moments when it looked like Earthworm Jim would make a comeback – in 2003 concept art for a prototype game were leaked for a PlayStation 2 and Xbox release.

In 2006, a PSP version of the game went into development, and although early screenshots suggested that it was a remake of the original, it was promised to be a new adventure featuring new environments, Super Suit Overdrive power and an expanded range of moves and attacks. Unfortunately, publisher Atari, owners to the rights of the franchise at the time, hit economic difficulties and development came to a halt.

> "I remember drawing while listening to Fleetwood Mac and I created Jim and a number of villains in 45 minutes!" DOUG TENNAPEL



With the exception of Gameloft's recent HD remake on Xbox Live Arcade and PSN, the prospect of another Earthworm Jim appearance is slim and a fourth game even more unlikely. "We have talked about it many times but the team members all have successful careers doing their own things now," remarks Dave Perry. "It's not impossible, but it's not likely for the time being."

The legacy of Earthworm Jim may be over, but his adventures still live on fondly in the minds of gamers and in the hearts of those who brought him to life. "In the end, I make art for other people and Earthworm Jim moved a lot of people to love a creation that I don't entirely feel worthy of," comments Doug. "In the end, it's not about me. What I make has a life of its own and what it becomes is not a reflection of my own power or ability. I'm just happy that something I was involved in put a smile on so many faces. It's entirely possible that nothing else I make will have the same effect on so many people. In some ways I never thought so many people shared my tastes in what I thought was funny or interesting. We're all living at the right place and at the right time for me to not only make Jim but for so many people to enjoy it."

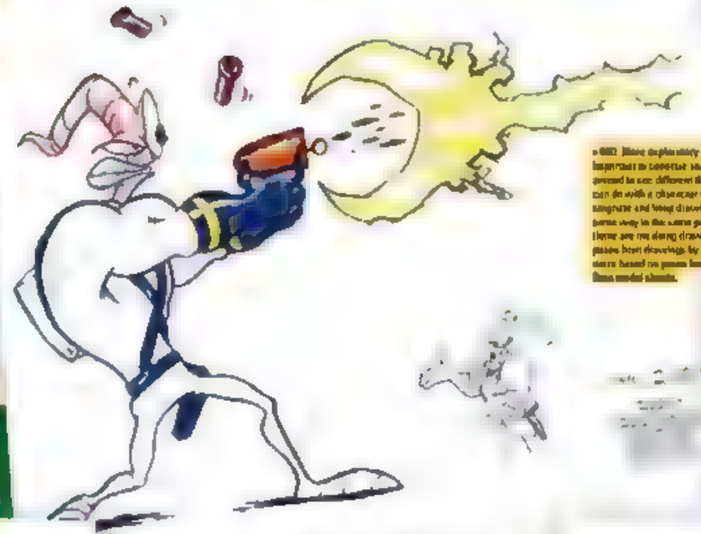
Many thanks to Katherine Garner of Rocketworm (www.rocketworm.com) for providing concept art and sprites for this feature. Thanks to Dave Perry, Doug TenNapel, Kirk Ewing and Mike Dietz for their time.

THE ART OF EARTHWORM JIM

Doug TenNapel and Mike Dr
art and the game's popula

DT I ORIGINALLY TOOK JIM'S FORM AND TRACED HIM OVER EVERY WARNER BROS MODEL SHEET I COULD FIND TO SEE HOW HE WOULD MOVE SO I'D FIND THIS EXTREME DRAWING OF DAFFY DUCK, THEN I'D HANG EWJ OVER THAT POSE

• MD: This was a concept sketch I did for a pose to be animated for an EWJ TV commercial I ended up screening a pencil test of Jim grabbing his head and whipping the camera based on this pose.



• MD: Another random sketch. Having fun and exploring the character.

• MD: Many exploratory sketches. It's important to consider anything around to see different things you can do with a character so you don't stagnate and keep drawing him the same way in the same poses. Some of these are my doing drawings based on poses from old Warner Bros model sheets.

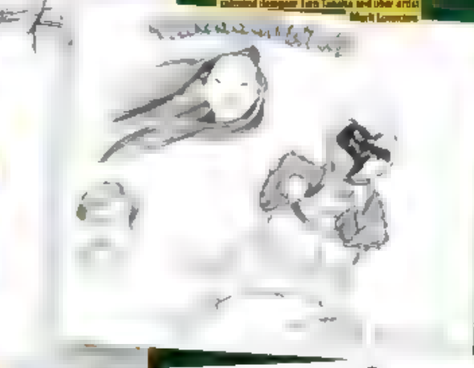
• MD: Another sketchbook drawing. Again, was just having fun doodling Jim. He's a great character to draw.

• MD: Many drawings from my sketchbook. They didn't serve any specific purpose. I just enjoyed drawing Jim and did as whatever got the chosen.

• MD: These were some concept sketches from my sketchbook exploring things you could do with the worm.

DT A WORM HERO NEEDED THE PERFECT VILLAIN. A CROW, OF COURSE. I KNEW THE BAD GUY WOULD BE A BIRD, BUT I PICKED THE DIRTIEST BLACK BIRD I COULD THINK OF.

• MD: This is one of a set of rough sketches I did when I was exploring images for a print ad. I ended up doing a finished illustration of this pose for a magazine cover. Afterward Mike Kazaleh did another painting based on this pose. His illustration was very better than mine! and then a digital version of this pose ended up in the game. so we got a lot of mileage out of this one. Ironically, it's one of my least favorite drawings I ever did of Jim. I always preferred the lanky Jim over the tough guy character.

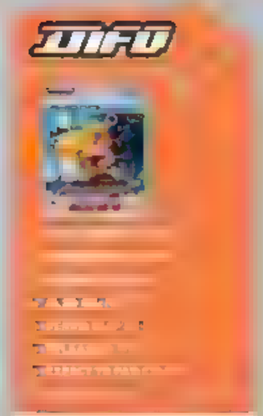


• MD: A sketchbook drawing of Psycrow, never really got a good look at him. Doug and I'd sketches of Psycrow and more. We didn't make over did. The other drawings are of two of the team members, super-talented designer Tom Tanaka and other artist Mark Lewandowski.

DT IF YOU THINK OF THE CONTRAST I WAS CREATING IN JIM BEING POWERFUL BUT WEAK, PETER PUPPY REFLECTED THAT IN HIS GOOD NATURED INNOCENCE THAT TURNED INTO A HORRIBLE SPACE MONSTER AT ANY SECOND.

DT IN ADDITION TO BEING AN AMPHIBIAN FAN, I ALSO LOVE THE ANATOMY OF INSECTS. I STARTED HER CREATION WITH THE BLOATED ABDOMEN OF A TERMITE QUEEN. THAT WAS THE GROSSEST THING I COULD THINK OF IN THE ANIMAL KINGDOM.

IMPORT ONLY



EVOLUTION OF THE GENRE

Retro

RELEASED 1987
Link's debut was a staggering feat back in the day: a sprawling fantasy adventure the likes of which simply shouldn't have been possible on 8-bit hardware. It was here that many of the standards and features of both series and genre were first established.

Modern

RELEASED 2011
This disturbing top-down adventure from *Super Meat Boy* creator Edmund McMillen has a distinct *Zelda* vibe about it, although it also relies on random generation and roguelike elements to ensure that no two playthroughs are ever the same. An updated version of the game is due for release next year.

KAERU NO TAME NI KANE WA NARU

» IT LOOKS LIKE A ZELDA GAME, SOUNDS LIKE A ZELDA GAME AND WITHOUT IT, THERE MIGHT NOT EVEN HAVE BEEN A ZELDA GAME ON GAME BOY. LUKE ALBIGÈS REVISITS THE JAPAN-ONLY ADVENTURE THAT PAVED THE WAY FOR LINK'S AWAKENING

If you ever play a *Zelda* game and think to yourself 'yeah, it was okay, but it could have done with a few more frogs'? Of course you didn't. Nobody did. Still, just as in any good episode of *Dragon's Den*, we're here with a solution to a problem that doesn't exist. Only in this case, said solution involves you getting to play a great game you've most likely never even heard of before. Despite its low profile in the West (on account of not being released here), *Kaeru No Tame Ni Kane Wa Naru* – or *For The Frog The Bell Tolls*, to give the game its translated title – has pedigree behind it as well as influence beyond. And while it's perhaps not exactly a classic in its own right, this amphibian adventure has a place in the history books as the game that laid the foundations for Link to go handheld.

You see, the engine at the heart of *For The Frog The Bell Tolls* is an early version of the one that would later be used for *Link's Awakening*, the first portable *Zelda* game and one of the best games in the franchise. But as much as its design would inform the later *Zelda* game, it is also informed by previous ones. While *A Link To The Past* would return to the template of the original, *For The Frog The Bell Tolls* instead takes its cues from *Zelda II*. The top-down viewpoint works wonders for world map navigation, but dungeon exploration takes the form of several side-scrolling sections – a format that the Game Boy *Zelda* debut would also use.

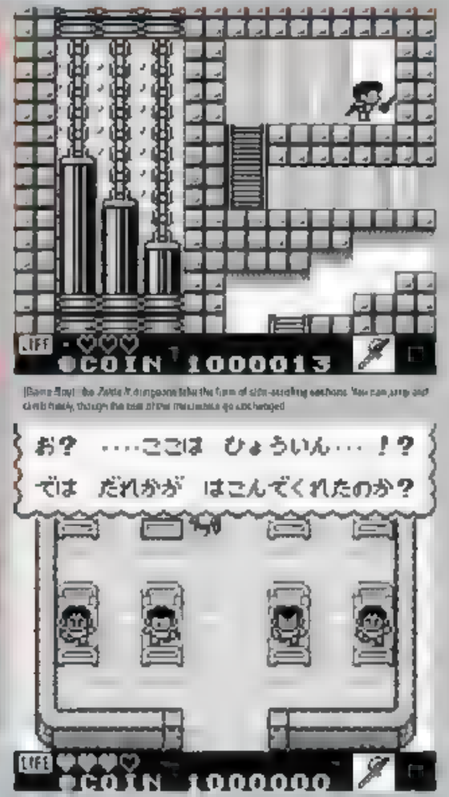
Game Boy: Chrono Trigger, Star Fox, Rocket Knight... could it be that the secret of great games might just be to give a frog a starring role?

One key difference, though, is that *For The Frog The Bell Tolls* doesn't really have a combat system per se. You approach an enemy and the entire battle takes place in a dust cloud, outside of your control. Life is slowly sapped from both player and enemy based on attack and defence ratings until only one is left standing – regular enemies go down pretty easy but in the case of boss fights, you need to have the best gear available and a full life bar in order to come out on top. It's a simple system but one that controls progress brilliantly, even if the lack of interaction may not be ideal. The same mechanic would later be used in DS oddity *Freshly-Picked: Tingle's Rosy Rupeeland* – a rare example of a spin-off borrowing from the inspiration rather than the source material.

The engine at the heart of For The Frog The Bell Tolls is an early version of the one that would later be used for Link's Awakening

Going into *For The Frog The Bell Tolls* after several years of playing *Zelda*, you'd find it hard to miss the various similarities. Mechanically, it's extremely similar, from the basic structure to the equipment menu. Music, while courtesy of a different composer, is also pretty close and the rest of the audio, including those little fanfares when you pick up something valuable, is on the same page too. Animation is so close that some of the same routines are actually reused in *Link's Awakening* – Link's death spin is common in *For The Frog The Bell Tolls*, while there are countless other deja vu moments waiting for anyone who has served their time with the Wind Fish.

While many many dismiss – and rightly so – gamers who handheld nothing but one running [illegible] that, even without the Hyrule setting and familiar precedes, it's still one of the best games in the series. Gameplay was adapted brilliantly to accommodate the small [illegible]



Game Boy: Losing a fight sends you to the hospital. There's no penalty for death beyond having to refill missing hearts, so explore away!

Too many great Japan-only games will never be enjoyed by many Western players due to the language barrier, so it's with mad respect for the people responsible that we get to say that there's a brilliant fan translation out there for *Kaeru No Tame Ni Kane Wa Naru*. It's perfectly playable without, as long as you don't mind missing out on some of the nuance and most of the characters being named after puddings. But this is an important slice of gaming history – if the dedication of a fan translating and re-coding the entire script can help educate and entertain more people, we can't see how that could ever be construed as a negative.

Any *Zelda* fan owes it to themselves to check out *For The Frog The Bell Tolls*. It's a simpler game than most of Link's outings but looks, feels and plays like a proof of concept for one of the best games in the series. Hands-off battles stand out for being entertaining if not involving, a method that games like *Assassin's Creed* still employ to this day. Side-scrolling sections are ace, though you'd expect no less with *Metroid* veteran Makoto Kanoh on board. And neat gameplay gimmicks like allowing the player to transform into various animals (no, not just frogs) elevate this to something more impressive, something more important than it might otherwise be. As the missing link in the *Zelda* timeline, fans would do well to befriend a few frogs and fill in the gaps in their knowledge in the process.

MYTH HISTORY IN THE MAKING

SYSTEM 3'S TALE OF MAGICAL INTRIGUE AND MYSTERY TAKES PLACE OVER – LITERALLY – THOUSANDS OF YEARS. GRAEME MASON EXPLORES THE CREATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THIS CLASSIC ACTION-ADVENTURE

BY 1986, SYSTEM 3 SOFTWARE HAD BEEN ESTABLISHED FOR SIX YEARS AND WAS ALREADY WELL-KNOWN FOR GAMES SUCH AS THE BEAT-'EM-UP INTERNATIONAL KARATE AND THE EXCELLENT SERIES OF LAST NINJA GAMES ON COMMODORE 64. Eager to step up production, owner Mark Cale had already begun overseeing the development of many more projects, mostly in line with his ethos of producing original gaming experiences rather than games based on licensed properties – a trend that was becoming increasingly common.

One such project was *Myth: History in The Making*, and Mark himself explains to us the initial idea. "I wanted to construct a game using stories that people could identify with, something well-known; as we began researching myths such as the Hydra, Medusa and the Norse legends with the idea of putting them into a game." The basic format for *Myth* would ultimately work as follows: after an initial level set in Hades, the player, a contemporary hero summoned through time to do battle with an evil demon, is transported to several different eras including ancient Greece (400 BC), Scandinavia (900 AD) and Egypt (3000 BC). In order to proceed to the present day and a final showdown with the main villain, Daemeron, the levels had to be traversed, puzzles had to be solved and each end of level guardian (a famous mythical creature perverted to evil by Daemeron) had to be defeated.

Work began on *Myth* in 1988, with development taking just over a year in total for the 8-bit computers. The programmer and graphic artist team of Pete Baron and Bob Stevenson worked on the original Commodore 64 version. "Bob and I had just finished a conversion of Konami's *Salamander*," begins Pete, "and it went down pretty well. So my agent, Jacqui Lyons, hooked us up with System 3 and Mark Cale for its next project." Pete was handed a document detailing how System 3 imagined *Myth* that could transpire. "It wasn't great, truth be told, and largely a sprawling collection of mythological research jammed into an ordinary platform game." After plucking up the courage, Pete and Bob approached Mark Cale with their reservations; fortunately, the System 3 chief agreed and listened keenly to the new design offered by them. Pete explains: "We thought they'd gone too in-depth. Our impression was that if the myths were not pretty much common knowledge then they would be too obscure for a lot of players. So we went out and bought a few children's books, with one title from Penguin I remember being particularly useful for source material. Anything aimed at pre-teens was saw as being full of perfect stuff to put into the game." The design produced by the programming team was based around key puzzles that required either the aforementioned ubiquitous mythological knowledge or some old-fashioned exploration and experimentation. Each section was to include one or two puzzles with three sections per level and four levels in total. This, mixed in with swordplay, shooting action and platforming, would make up the gameplay for *Myth*. There was no doubting the team's ambition.

Over on the ZX Spectrum and Amstrad, coding duties were handled by Creative Reality's Neil Dodwell, with colleague Dave Dew working on the graphics. "Together with Jez Austin we were working for Mastertronic writing games such as *Nemesis The Warlock*, *Tarzan* and *Rex*," says Neil.

THE OTHER MYTH

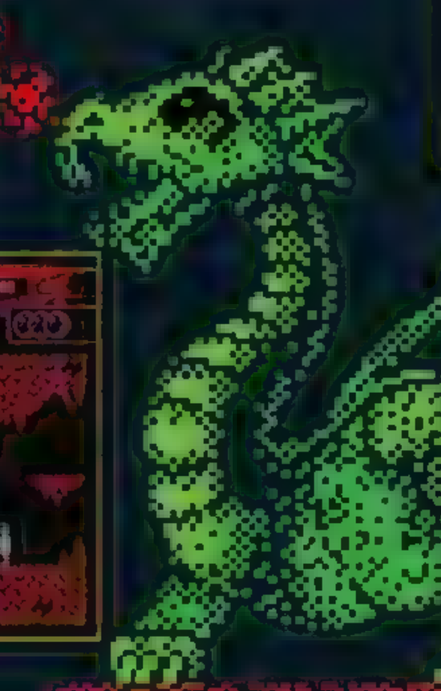
Earlier in 1988, famous adventure publisher Magnetic Scrolls released *Myth*, a small adventure sold only to members of an Adventurer's Club called Official Secrets. We say sold, it was actually given away free and procured at Crash Smash in the process. The game focused on just one legend, that of the Greek Gods – specifically Poseidon – where the player took control of Thanks to its limited release, the Magnetic Scrolls game remains relatively obscure and is one of the many formed 'MA games on website World Of Spectrum. "We were never aware of any other game called *Myth*," admits Mark Cale, "and ours was always called *Myth with the strapline History in The Making* because we felt the phrase was perfect underlining the design of our game."

System 3's Mark Cale.

"I WANTED TO CONSTRUCT A GAME USING STORIES THAT PEOPLE COULD IDENTIFY WITH"

Further to this, we weren't really earning enough and considered it time for a change. Then one day, someone recommended "we talk to this agent." The agent in question was none other than Jacqui Lyons, and within a few days of meeting Jacqui, Dave and Neil were also on board the *Myth* project. "System 3 seemed to be a pretty cool company to work for. I remember Mark Cale was driving a Ferrari; I turned up to meetings in my Ford Capri!" laughs Neil. However, even the design document rejigged by Pete Baron and Bob Stevenson failed to excite Dave and Neil. "It was written essentially for the Commodore 64 and didn't seem to be something we could reproduce for the Spectrum. So we simply decided to interpret it as best we could."

Despite the [illegible] of Dr. Sumner, Creative Reality's experience on the Sinclair machine served them very well when it came to *Myth*. "Jez [Austin] had tried this technique in *Rex*,



[see Retro Gamer 112] where we avoided attribute clash by having a colourful scene that the player went behind rather than in front of and we used the same principle in *Myth*." Although the technique had been pioneered in other games such as Virgin's *Dan Dare*, it was a combination of this and the superb animation that really caught the eye in the Spectrum version of *Myth*. "That probably came from me writing a program that allowed Dave to animate as freely as possible and to then compress and sequence the animation into the game," explains Neil. "We'd also written our own sprite animation tools as it always seemed to help having our own software." Despite this, Neil still has reservations about the animation. "Although it had a lot of frames and looked great, playing it now feels like we sacrificed playability for visuals a little. Actually, I'm surprised it all managed to fit into the memory."

C64 coder Pete Baron was also impressed by the job Creative Reality had done on the Spectrum. "They realised very early that our design played to the strengths of the C64, yet what was amazing was that they didn't then reduce it to the lowest common denominator and make a second-rate game: instead they re-designed it very carefully from the ground up and made a classic game in its own right." Perhaps the biggest change was the lack of scrolling on the Spectrum version ("There was no way we could do that on the Spectrum, so we used a window that moved along the map but overlapped the previous screen," recalls Neil), and the shift in focus from swordplay to shooting. But there was one big problem common to both games, as Pete Baron tells us: "It was an ambitious game, and Mark was always keen to get product out very quickly." Time was, ironically, the teams' greatest enemy. "Consequently we were up against some pretty harsh deadlines and in the end we went over quite significantly. Fortunately, by then it was gone far enough that everyone could see the game was going to be something special." Nevertheless, the time issue did force the programmers to compromise when it came to the incongruous conclusion to *Myth*.

"The final level wasn't originally designed as a shoot-'em-up," reveals Pete, "as we had some really weird hallucinogenic-type ideas where dissecting the Egyptian tomb had given you levitational powers so you could jump and hover for a while over another mainly platform level. I wish we'd had the time for it." Spectrum coder Neil Dodwell agrees. "We had spent so long on the main levels that I think we had only two or three days left to do that bit, so we just tried to throw it together. It all seemed a bit random, and I don't think it makes any sense really."

System 3 boss Mark Cale has a different, more calculated view on *Myth*'s strange final part. "We felt the shoot-'em-up genre was still popular and that, after all the platforming and puzzling, the player would want a change and that it would be a pleasant surprise." As a result, the shooting level remained intact in all subsequent versions, and, despite its incongruity, made a refreshing change at the end of the game.

Myth: History In The Making on the 8-bits was a big hit and scored impressively in the gaming press. *Zzap!* reviewed it in November of 1989 and comments varied from "completely amazing" to "a wonderful mix of arcade action", despite the reviewers still noting a relative obscurity of some of the puzzles. Sister publication, *Crash*, was equally effusive of the Spectrum version, concluding that the game was "Great on brawn, great on brain, great on graphics – a winner!" and scored it an outstanding 96 per cent.

Not content with the C64, Spectrum and Amstrad versions, System 3 touted *Myth* to the American market and eventually found an interested partner in publisher Mindscape. Taking the overshadowing Commodore 64 version as a base, Mindscape felt the game wasn't strong enough on its own to succeed, leading it to shoehorn *Myth* into its *Conan The Barbarian* license. They released the game on the Nintendo Entertainment System but at this point in time (1991), felt the system still had not achieved a convincing foothold in Europe, resulting in *Conan* ultimately only seeing the light of day in their own territory. Meanwhile, System 3 pressed on with the Amiga and Atari ST versions that naturally included upgraded graphics and other technical improvements, but suffered as a game that was starting to look dated as games design began to slowly advance into 3D. Additionally, an obligatory change from the release of *Conan The Barbarian* was the artwork – it was obvious the executive original cover and advertisement depicting a contemporary young man dressed in jeans, T-shirt and trainers with numerous mythical creatures hovering menacingly above him did not fit into the *Conan* canon. Therefore, a generic barbarian with rippling muscles was created for the NES adverts and box art and, when the game eventually made it onto the 16-bits, System 3 kept the theme. The original 8-bit "were mortal" storyline was no more.

Pete Baron says excitedly, "It was a little too late in the Commodore 64's life cycle to make me famous at the time, but it helped a lot when Bob and I went to sell our next concept to Devious Designs which paid the bills for the next 18 months! I still get a big buzz every time I see a new fan site or a good reference to the game – I'm hugely proud of it." Neil Dodwell is equally proud of his team's versions of *Myth*: "Especially within the bounds of what the ZX Spectrum was capable of, I think we did a brilliant job. We made a very Spectrum version of what was essentially a C64 game. It was made even more worth it when the reviews came out: getting a *Crash* Smash was the highlight of any game developer's career!" But we leave the final words, and a surprising admission, to System 3 boss Mark Cale. "We always aimed for the best, so we weren't surprised when *Myth* got a Sizzler and a *Crash* Smash. I'm proud of all our games, but this one in particular for the diversity between the Spectrum and Commodore 64 versions. I actually think the Spectrum version is best!"

On that bombshell, we think it's time to step back into ancient Greece once more.

Many thanks to Pete Baron, Neil Dodwell

MORE ON MYTH: HISTORY IN THE MAKING

- The Spectrum version currently sits at 52 in the top 100 games vote, short of World Of Spectrum and number 12 in the Your Sinclair top 100 games chart from 1993, as voted for by the YS readers.
- Pete Baron himself admits that the decaying health feature on the C64 version was a mistake: "It was a last minute decision made only because we had complaints from testers that the game was too easy. But by that time they knew all the puzzle solutions so were just basing this on the fighting difficulty."
- When the files for the game returned from Germany (where the copy protection was incorporated), it was more tightly compressed than System 3 were expecting. Consequently, with a little extra space to play with, Bob and Pete spent a day digitising a welcome message for the C64 version. "And it's one of the things that people always remember most about the game!" smiles Pete.
- Neil Dodwell also wrote the Amstrad version of *Myth*. "I was mainly active for Creative Reality on the Amstrad so it was natural I should convert *Myth* (for System 3 as well. I wrote both versions on the floor in my bedroom at my parent's house as I didn't even have a desk back then!"
- The expensive story that accompanied the original 8-bit versions of *Myth* was written by Tim Best, who also devised the story to *The Last Ninja*.
- The music to the Commodore 64 version was from legendary Dutch Computers Maniacs Of Noise – aka Jeroen Tel.

"GREAT ON BRAWN, GREAT ON BRAIN, GREAT ON GRAPHICS – A WINNER!"

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

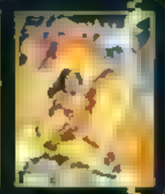
INTERNATIONAL KARATE
PICTURED
SYSTEM: COMMODORE 64, ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD, ATARI ST
YEAR: 1986

THE LAST NINJA
SYSTEM: COMMODORE 64, COMMODORE AMIGA
YEAR: 1988

PUTTY SQUAD
SYSTEM: SNES
YEAR: 1994

A TALE OF TWO TALES

With the NES version of *Myth* adapted for a vacant *Conan The Barbarian* license, the original artwork had to be changed. Compare here the box art for the original 8-bit version depicting the "immortal" yanked from the 20th Century to the muscle-bound barbarian star of the NES and 16-bit versions.



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Minority Report

FAMICOM

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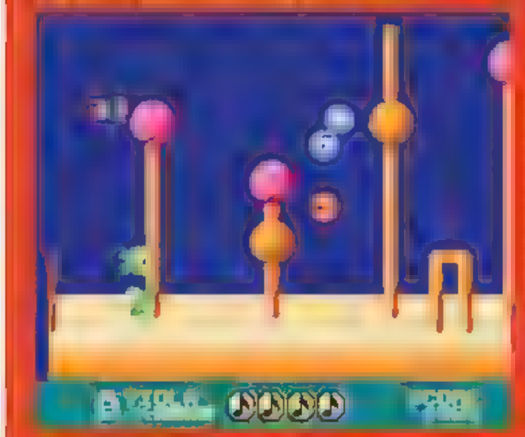
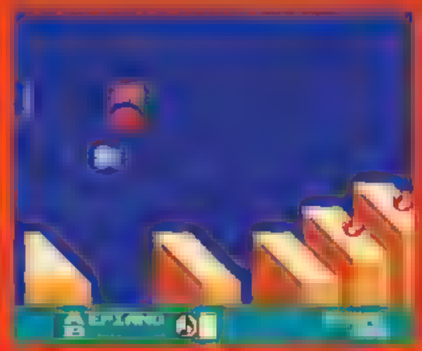
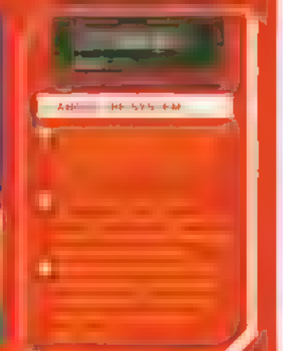
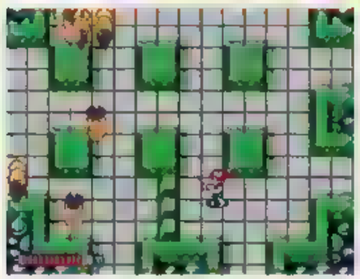


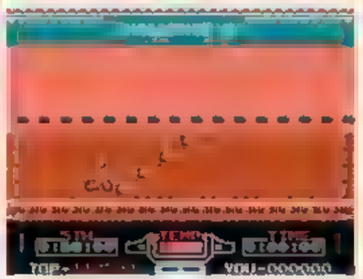






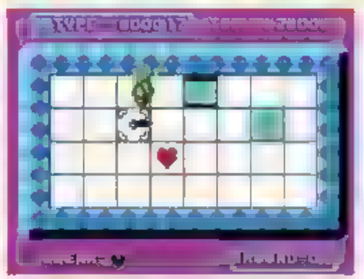
» AI SENSHI NICOL

Loosely translated as *Love Warrior Nicol*, this action title shares similarities with the top-down shooting segments taken from Gradius – another game by Konami. The player is tasked to track down three diamonds on the game's seven eclectic stages, each of which is ruled by a different boss character. By collecting items of a futuristic space suit, the player can cross certain obstacles and avoid taking heavy damage, making it a fitting for an 8-bit title released in 1987. Ai Senshi Nicol has since been released on mobile phones in Japan but remains largely unknown in the West. Despite its dedicated status as a Konami action game.



» VS EXCITEBIKE

Not to be confused with the 1984 arcade version – which carried the same title – *Vs. Excitebike* is notable for its friendly two-player mode which allows friendly competition between chums. Players can pick the track they wish to race on, the amount of rounds needed to decide the winner and the number of laps taken. Furthermore, user-generated tracks can be saved to the Famicom Disk System format, thanks to the rewritable nature of the console's media. *Vs. Excitebike* is arguably one of the best versions of the game, thanks to its two-player mode and its customisable nature is well-suited to the console.



» KNIGHT MOVE

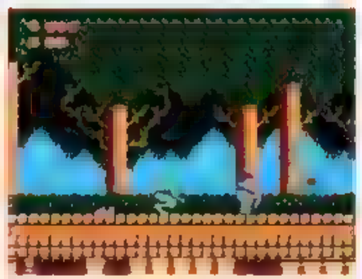
Created by Alexey Pajitnov – better known as the mind behind *Tetris* – *Knight Move* is a puzzle title that is based around the L-shape movement of a knight piece in a game of chess. The objective is to remove the pieces from the board and the challenge lies in avoiding a nasty fall down a hole you've created. Exclusive to the console, *Knight Move* is collectable largely due to the legendary status of its creator. Not to be confused with Microsoft's 1995 Windows-based puzzle *Knight Moves*, which is based on the Famicom Disk System title but had no input from Pajitnov.

» KAETTE KITA MARIO BROS

Released in Japan as part of a Famicom Disk Writer promotion – which allowed owners to write new titles on their existing disks – this enhanced port of *Mario Bros* showcases revised gameplay, tightened controls, additional cut-scenes and the ability to save your score. Interestingly, *Mario Bros* Classic – a recently cartridge release for Nintendo's 8-bit console – is based on this version, rather than the North American NES original, most likely down to the fact that it boasts better controls. Because it was only available via the Disk Writer, this is an incredibly rare title.

» BOMBRACLE POKJITTE LPA

An action platformer with a baby as the lead character, *Bomb Miracle Bokujitte Lpa* launched as a Famicom Disk System exclusive in 1988 but would later find its way to the standard Famicom in 1989. It was slated for release in the West, but the end of America blocked the move. The game's lofty status ensures that it eventually arrived on the Wii Virtual Console in 2008, although it should be noted that this version is based on the cartridge edition, which lacks the additional audio channel present in the Famicom Disk System original. Cute and playable, this is a must-have purchase for the Disk System library.



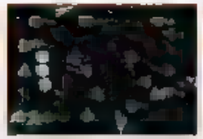
» MONTY NO DOKI DOKI DA SASSOU

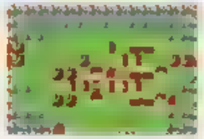
Based on Gremlin's *Monty On The Run*, *Monty No Doki Doki Dasassou* sees the mole character for a human and transports the action from England to a collection of forgotten temples. Despite the changes – and the obscure nature of the Japanese release – *Monty No Doki Doki Dasassou* remains an enduring performer and serves as an excellent example of how popular Western games can be altered to suit the tastes of Japanese audiences. Needless to say, a game about a mole escaping from the Miners Strike may have been lost on Famicom owners on the other side of the world.

Minority Report

NAZO NO MURASAME JŌ

FALSION



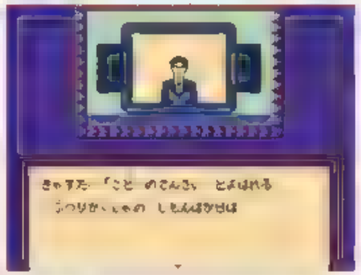


» SHIN ONIGASHIMA

Famicom Mukashi Banashi: *Shin Onigashima* was given the game's full title. It actually had separate releases, both launched in Japan in September 1987. A text adventure at heart, *Shin Onigashima* was created by Nintendo R&D's Tatsuya Hishida, who not only wrote the story but designed the characters as well. It's one of the only games that makes use of the Famicom Disk System's ability to swap disks when switched on – the second disk won't actually run without the first. The sequel, *Famicom Mukashi Banashi: Toukyuu*, would follow in 1989 and use the same novel mechanic.

» SUISHO NO DRAGON

Unique for its time, the adventure title boasts an uncomfortable interface and a point-and-click-style cursor which can be moved using the keypad to examine objects of interest. Anime-style cutscenes from Japanese studio Nippon Sunrise help bring the game to life, and the wacky sci-fi setting was ahead of its time. In a 1990 RPG, released interestingly Square released *Suishō No Dragon* – roughly translated as "The Quartz Dragon" under its DOG (Desk Original Group) label, which was established especially to create Famicom Disk System titles – a sign of confidence from others and developers to develop the format, despite what was released

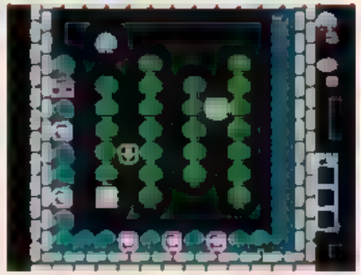


» TIME TWIST REKISHI NO KATASUMIDE

Like *Shin Onigashima*, *Time Twist: Rekishi No Katasumi De* was released on two disks, the first of which has to be completed before the second one can be used. The game features time travel as core story concept, with the player going back in time to meet with famous figures such as Joan of Arc, Adolf Hitler, Alexander the Great and even Jesus Christ. Released in July 1991 – eight months after the launch of the Super Famicom – it was the final packaged Famicom Disk System title and has since become quite a collector's item.

» ARMANA NO KISEKI

Clearly inspired by the famous *Indiana Jones* films, *Armana No Kiseki* – also known as *Miracle Of Armana* – is an action platformer that sees the main character exploring underground caverns in search of treasure. The game's grappling hook mechanic borrows heavily from an earlier Konami release called *Rod-N-Rope*, which launched in arcades in 1983. The impressive visuals, light gameplay and excellent music composed by Kinuyo Yamashita all combine to make this one of the Famicom Disk System's more enjoyable action titles – it's a real shame it never made its way over to the standard Famicom and NES as a cartridge release.



» EGGERLAND SOZOHE NO TABIDACHI

Part of the same series which includes the NES classic *Adventures Of Lolo*, *Eggerland: Sōzōhe No Tabidachi* – *Eggerland: Departure to Creation* – is a puzzle title set across 90 maps, many of which are recycled from the 1985 Mega precursor, *Egger and Masters*. A construction mode allows you to create your own maps, and this level of custom saves adds greatly to the game's longevity. A Game Boy entry appeared in 1994, but since 1996 instalments in the *Egger and* series have remained exclusive to computers in Japan, with the last release – *Revival Egger and* – seeing the light of day in 2001.

» FAMICOM GRAND PRIX II: 3D HOT RALLY

The sequel to *Famicom Grand Prix: F1 Race*, this title substitutes Formula One cars for all-terrain rally vehicles. Mario and Luigi are starring roles, and the game is notable for making use of the Famicom 3D glasses to create an immersive 3D effect while racing. Like its forebear, *Famicom Grand Prix II* came with support for the Disk Fax, which allowed high scores to be posted directly to Nintendo – a primitive form of the online leaderboards we enjoy in modern games. Because of this, came on a blue disk – the final Famicom Disk System title to do so.

YOUR VIDEOGAME ICONS

Curators Darran Jones and Damien McFerran walk you through a museum of some of gaming's greatest icons, as chosen by you

From the surreal adventures of Mister Molly to the mentionably explicit Vivian, it would appear that everyone loves a good videogame hero. Some characters are straightforward crowd-pleasers, while others are carefully planned to compete against rival rascals. Some videogame heroes like Lara Croft helped redefine the perception of feminism in videogames, while the creation of Cuthbert Tinkerwood sent him a simple level of pirates. No matter the origins, every single character over the following pages has become forever associated with videogames and in the case of a select few, have outgrown the medium they started in to become cultural icons in their own right. Mario, Kirby, Mario, Sonic, Lara Croft and even Master Chief have become superb examples of this, and their faces adorn everything from T-shirts to lunch boxes. Although Mario, Pac-Man and the rest of you lot, we were more interested in grouping classic characters together like you might find in an actual museum. Join us then as we reveal your personal favourites from the last 30 odd years of gaming.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: RAD MOBILE ■ YEAR: 1991

It's rather fitting to start off with one of the most recognisable videogame characters of all time – our museum of the stars.

Regardless of whether you like his newer outings, are up to the game standards as his Mega Drive glory years, there is no denying the sheer impact that Sonic has had over the past two decades. Virtually every aspect of Sonic's creation was designed with one goal in mind: to become a rival to Mario. As a result, he went through numerous design changes – including a brief period in which he armed to – before Sega eventually settled on its iconic blue hedgehog that is now as unmistakable as Sega's own logo.

Unlike Mario, Sonic was edgy. He was a loner who lived in a world away from his mentor dog's friendly, plumber and gamers quickly took to it. When you think of Sonic, you think of speed, a spunky attitude and those glory days of when you were a team Sega. A well-timed gaffe such as allowed Sega to have back the console market – shame that Nintendo has done it so long.

Sonic soon outgrew the Mega Drive, moving into games, cartoons and replicating. And it does not stop there. A popular trait holds today. You see Sonic long before you see Sega's logo on office and his popular arms-crossed pose is a constant reminder of the innocent cheekiness that never rubbed off on the many other videogames that Sonic has been added with over the years.

He admittedly lost some of his charm once he initially found his voice – something the many videogame characters have been guilty of, and he unfairly affected all the younger generation now, but it's hard not to see Sega's mascot and not get excited. Few other characters say videogames as well as Sonic. Not bad for a character who started off as Mr. Needlemouse.

8-bit heroes

From the vine-swinging exploits of Pitfall Harry to the pill-munching madness of Pac-Man, we highlight gaming's earliest celebrities

THE HARDWARE LIMITATION OF THE ATARI 2600 DICTATED EVERYTHING: EVEN FRAME-OF-HARRY ANIMATION HAD TO FIT ON A EIGHT PIXEL WIDE BY 16 HALF-PIXEL TALL SPRITE

Pitfall Harry

■ FIRST APPEARANCE PITFALL! ■ YEAR 1982

When David Crane hastily sketched out the concept of Pitfall Harry, little did he know that his hero's debut adventure would go on to shift over 4 million units. Pitfall Harry tapped into the public's hunger for adventurers like Indiana Jones and became an unofficial mascot for Activision, appearing on numerous ads, flyers, merchandise and even a cartoon Saturday Supercade, which also featured segments on Donkey Kong, Q*bert and Frogger amongst others. He arguably dipped in popularity in recent years as his latest adventure, the highly enjoyable Pitfall was confined to mobile devices – but it's clear that you still have plenty of love for one of gaming's oldest adventurers.

Dizzy

■ FIRST APPEARANCE DIZZY ■ YEAR 1987

His Kickstarter may have recently crashed and burned, but there's still plenty of love for Dizzy if your votes is anything to go by. Dizzy comes from that magical time in gaming where even an egg wearing boxing gloves could turn into a celebrity. First created by the Oliver twins for Codemasters in 1987, Dizzy took a little while to catch on but steadily built a cult following, ensuring that many of his sequels went to the top of their respective charts. We're likely to ever see a brand new adventure, but the iOS port of *Prince Of The Yolkfolk* at least allows him to be enjoyed by a new generation of gamers.

Miner Willy

■ FIRST APPEARANCE MANIC MINER ■ YEAR 1983

Few computer characters are as recognisable as Matthew Smith's Miner Willy. Like many videogame icons of the 8-bit era, he is not only a product of his time, but he also represents what many consider to be a golden age in gaming. Manic Miner was a huge hit on the Spectrum with Matthew Smith's surreal sprite designs and carefully designed levels combining to create one of the system's defining games.

Although not the most iconic of characters, with his hero and his game were partly inspired by Jeff Minter's Jetpac, Willy went on to become a cult icon, partly due to his appearance in Jet Set Willy but mainly due to the efforts of Smith, who became arguably as iconic over the intervening years as the character he had created.

A humble miner by trade, Miner Willy is one of many popular videogame characters whose gameplay sprung from a distinctive working class background. Only in this case, Willy does good eventually finding a fortune and going on to own a gaudy mansion which is subject of the sixteen Jet Set Willy sequels, Go Ski Willy and a

Pac-Man

■ FIRST APPEARANCE PAC-MAN ■ YEAR 1980

Pac-Man is one of gaming's earliest celebrities. So it's hardly surprising that he remains so firmly entrenched in the memory of today's gamers. Only sonic and Mario received more votes from you, which is an impressive achievement for a character that was partly inspired by a simple slice of pizza. The reason behind Pac-Man's success and subsequent popularity was not the fact that he was instantly recognisable – although we'd argue that certainly helped him – but that he was accessible to any gamer, regardless of their gender or age.

Now, nearly 35 years after Pac-Man's release, Namco realised it had a huge icon on its hands and it soon began to crank out sequels and merchandise. Over the intervening years, even today, Pac-Man merchandise is everywhere, with his cute yellow fuzzy appearance in every single children's cupboard, links and stress balls ensuring that he's never far from the public eye. This constant public reminder is due in part to Namco's preparedness to constantly bring his image back in new games every few years. He's appeared in over 36 of officially licensed games since his 1980 debut, while the 2001 smash hit *Pac-Man championship Edition* endeared him to a whole new generation of gamers.

Today he remains a massive cultural icon, having appeared in cartoons, movies, from Buckler & Gordon's Pac-Man Fever to Aphex Twin's Pac-Man album in 1992 – and even in movies like Scott Pilgrim vs The World. Even on Wednesday Night Knows about Pac-Man, a rather lessamed to just how popular the yellow munchies actually is even now.

AND ORDERED A ROUND PIZZA AND IT WAS MISSING A MEGA THE SHAPE OF WHAT IS NOW PAC-MAN SLASHED THROUGH MY MIND

Pac-Man Product on Pac-Man's Release Inspiration

Mega Man

■ FIRST APPEARANCE MEGA MAN ■ YEAR 1987

Few characters have aged as far as Mega Man has in the last few years. Back in the Eighties and early Nineties he was a massive deal, having appeared in six NES games, which in turn led to him becoming Capcom's official mascot. Instantly recognisable thanks to his highly blue threads and the fact that his right arm is a huge cannon, yearly updates kept him popular with gamers. While his unique ability to steal the weapons of bosses he had defeated made him a highly adaptable and versatile hero. While he's faced some embarrassing cancellations in recent years, the massive cheer that announced his appearance in Super Smash Bros suggests he still has plenty of fans.

Space Invader

■ FIRST APPEARANCE SPACE INVADERS

■ YEAR 1978

This guy is the only one you need to know that you don't actually need to know. Two years, finishing hours of gaming, Takashi Nishiyama's title, Space Invaders, was the first to introduce the concept of a recognisable character in the form of Defender, Galaxian in the late 70s and beyond. Space Invaders supported an all-round of recognisable form of Defender, Galaxian in the late 70s and beyond.

Sabreman

■ FIRST APPEARANCE SABRE WULF

■ YEAR 1984

We'd wager that [illegible] Sabreman's certainly [illegible] the popular [illegible] of [illegible] years of gamers – [illegible] [illegible] Sabreman's [illegible] [illegible] Sabreman's [illegible] [illegible] Sabreman's

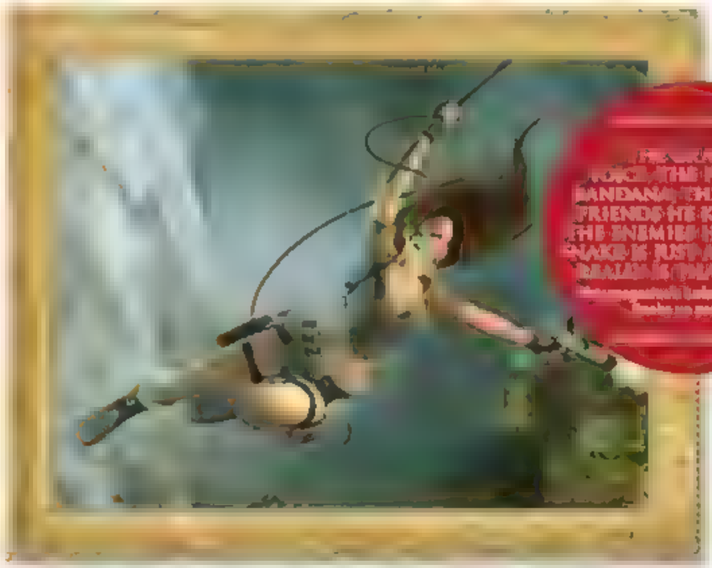
Newer heroes

As gaming grew up, so too did its protagonists, gaining the power of speech and plenty of other cool tricks that set them apart from earlier icons

Lara Croft

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: TOMB RAIDER ■ YEAR: 1996

Lara Croft is the [illegible] videogame character of all time. [illegible] anything else, [illegible] could do in games girls could do just as well, so much more than just [illegible] Indiana Jones with boobs. [illegible] apart from other characters of the time thanks to her gymnastic tools, distinct English accent and the fact that she starred in a genuinely groundbreaking videogame. While the original incarnation of Lara wasn't as well [illegible] as Rhianna [illegible] 2003 version, there were enough insights into her backgrounds to make her all more dynamic than many of her peers, inspired by both Jane Heyden's Tank Girl and the pop star Neneh Cherry, creator Toby Gard created Lara to be a counterpoint to all the [illegible]-dressed female characters that were prevalent at the time. Lara personified the same girl power which has powered the spectacular global success being a heroine that was just as home exploring ancient civilisations as she was in Croft Manor, and she eventually became deeper than the games she starred in. Movies were made, countless sequels were delivered [illegible] by Core Design and later by Crystal Dynamics, models were used to portray her in real life and she even made the cover of numerous magazines. The hope she lost her way in the core, when the emphasis was more on her breast size than her adventures, but Rhianna [illegible] got her back on track with last year's Tomb Raider reboot.



Ryu

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: STREET FIGHTER ■ YEAR: 1987

A wandering fighter who desires nothing more than to be the master of his craft, Ryu's determined stare is almost as iconic as his white karate gi and red gloves. Since his debut in 1987's Street Fighter, Ryu has been an ever-present face in the series, right up to the present day. His Hadouken fireball is one of the most instantly recognisable – not to mention copied – special moves in the one-on-one fighting genre, and his Shoryuken Dragon Punch is deadly when used at the right time. Friend and rival Ken Masters shares the same moves and basic sprite design, and is almost as famous.

Solid Snake

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: METAL GEAR ■ YEAR: 1987

A master of [illegible] espionage and blessed with one of the gruffest voices in videogames, Snake made his debut in the 1987 MSX2 title *Metal Gear*, but would find global fame in the 1998 PlayStation title *Metal Gear Solid*. Since then, Snake's adventures have sold over 30 million copies, making him one of video gaming's most bankable stars. He's even bagged himself a cameo in Nintendo's famous *Smash Bros* series alongside Sonic. *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* will take Snake, well, one version of him, anyway, into the next generation, and we wouldn't hesitate why he's become such an iconic creation. Not bad for a character that's blatantly modeled on Kurt Russell's turn as Snake Plissken in *Escape From New York*.

Cloud Strife

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: FINAL FANTASY VII ■ YEAR: 1997

We were rather surprised at the inclusion of Cloud Strife in your final selection as he's a hard character to love. Unlike many featured here, he's something of a moody sod, full of clichéd teenage angst. That initially makes him a very difficult hero to like, even [illegible] he does. Despite the epithets – cloud with the silver quiff and huge sword – [illegible]

We say initially because Cloud is one of the less transformative of any videogame character. Instead of a slowly transforming into a layered hero, what you see is what you get: behind his remains surly and aloof at times, and you've never really managed to evoke the coolness of his dark mirror, Sephiroth, but his well-written backstory gives you a keen insight into his motivations and really allows you to connect to him on a personal level. It's a rewarding piece of writing that, in some ways, makes him far more relatable than more popular icons like Mario.

Master Chief

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED ■ YEAR: 2001

It's hardly surprising that such a new character powered his way into your hearts. For the last 12 years, Master Chief has been a representative of videogames as Mario, Sonic or Pac-Man. Iconic thanks to his timeless armour and the helmet, Master Chief – or Petty Officer Johnson, as he's known to his friends – may be a man of few words, but he doesn't lack charm. Master Chief recalls Doom Guy and Gordon Freeman before him: a man of action, but he continues to expand his vocabulary with each new adventure.

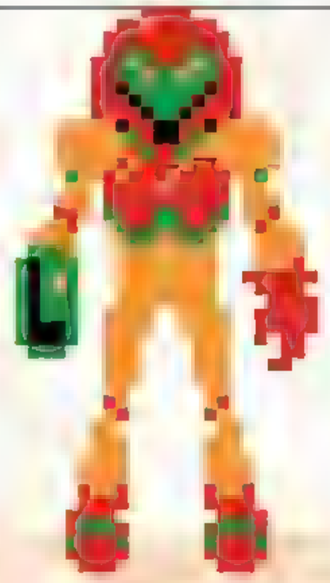
The Nintendo difference

Nintendo's characters were voted for so often by you that it only seemed right to give them their very own gallery

Donkey Kong

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: DONKEY KONG ■ YEAR: 1981

Shigeru Miyamoto's first smash-hit video game for Nintendo, *Donkey Kong*, marked the first appearance of both the titular ape and Mario himself – making it one of the most significant games in the history of the Japanese company. Shown as a dumb and spiteful monster in the original titles, Donkey Kong would later rise to heroic stardom as part of the *Donkey Kong Country* series, which started on the SNES and has since moved onto the Wii, Wii U and 3DS.



Link

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: THE LEGEND OF ZELDA ■ YEAR: 1986

Like so many of Nintendo's most famous characters, Link began life as a blob of pixels in a visually primitive 8-bit world, but has since grown to become one of the company's most deep and complex talents. His podgy appearance in the early NES titles has since given way to a mature and pudgy design, but recent outings such as *The Wind Waker* and *Phantom Hourglass* have allowed Link to return to his endearing roots. Held in higher regard by many Nintendo fans than even Mario, Link is a true videogaming legend.

Samus Aran

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: METROID
■ YEAR: 1984

Few videogame twists can match that moment at the end of *Metroid* when you realise that the beefy space marine you've been controlling is in fact a woman in a bikini – little wonder then that bounty hunter Samus Aran has become one of Nintendo's most celebrated – not to mention controversial – characters. *Super Metroid* cemented Aran's status as a superstar, while the *Metroid Prime* trilogy took her to new levels of fame. 2010's *Metroid: Other M* divided opinion, however, giving Samus a voice for the first time as well as a slightly annoying characterisation.

Mario

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: DONKEY KONG ■ YEAR: 1981

It was almost a foregone conclusion that Mario would be your – Nintendo's plump plumber is arguably one of the most iconic faces in popular culture across videogames, since Nintendo rose to power in the eighties. Mario has absorbed some of the best elements of interactive entertainment ever created, and has even been gifted with a Hollywood outing – although, needless to say, about that we'll refer

Although Mario started out in titles like *Donkey Kong* and *Mario Bros.* (1983), *Super Mario Bros.* (1985) was the only release apart from the legions of other, dreadful, oddly-themed spin-offs. The first game's feature-packed, mind-blowing levels of gameplay – now a staple of the genre – made it a hit, sold millions and contributed some heavy-duty cash to the marketplace. Sequels inevitably followed, and for many players there's no finer 2D platformer than *Super Mario World* (SNES), which challenged players with hundreds of levels in its massive world.

While many early 3D platform characters struggled to adapt to 3D, Mario made the leap no pun intended with assured aplomb. *Super Mario 64* remains one of the finest games of all time and has been improved upon by the likes of *Super Mario Sunshine* and *Super Mario Galaxy* on the GameCube and Wii respectively.

Of course, Mario's career has not been restricted to platform games – he's also a team player in the *Mario Kart* series and has tried his hand at medicine (*Dr Mario*), art (*Mario Paint*) and sport (*Mario Golf*, *Mario Tennis*, *Super Mario Strikers* – proving that he's versatile, handy at fixing your taps and saving princesses. Mario's illustrious CV also includes the likes of *Super Mario RPG*, *Paper Mario* and *Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga*, although in the latter game he's forced to share screen time with his taller, thinner sibling, Luigi. Mario has starred in over 200 different games, making him one of the most well-travelled and recognisable characters in the realm of interactive entertainment.

Mario's cute appearance may seem somewhat outdated in this age of hyperreality and visceral, but we have a feeling that he will be delighting gamers in many years to come. Nintendo has done a fantastic job at combining a universally appealing character with engaging and compelling gameplay – something that we hope will always be able to do. Mario has been able to adapt and enrich whatever genre he appears in, and he's sure to remain a vibrant presence in Nintendo's pantheon for a considerable amount of time.

RETROREVIVAL

The Apprentice

- Amstrad CPC 464
- Mastertronic
- 1986

Mastertronic's *The Apprentice* taught me a very important life lesson: never judge a videogame by its cover

I received my Amstrad CPC for my 4th birthday, and while I was gutted that I'd been saddled with a green screen rather than a colour one, in the fact that a mistake at Christmas meant I had double the amount of Amsoft games than I should have.

Of course, being a typical teenager, the games I had, and there were a lot, ranging from classics like *Roland on The Ropes* and *Dr Mummy to dings* like *Bridge It*, were not adequate and I simply had to buy a new game. Any game. It didn't matter what. I had to spend a whole birthday money as quickly as possible.

Arriving in Poole town centre, I began to look at the rows and rows of cassette tapes and my gaze fell on *The Apprentice*. It immediately caught my eye thanks to its *Fantasia*-esque cover, the shots on the back suggested the brilliance of *Sorcery*.

Sadly, a suggestion of *Sorcery* was all it was. Everything about *The Apprentice* was awful. From the sluggish, jerky movement of your main character to its horribly designed rooms. Monsters would instantly kill you if you entered a screen at the wrong point, while the inventory system, you could only carry one item at a time and unfair collision detection made you want to cry. It was a total, total rip-off. My second purchase, and I never got suckered in by a cover ever again. ★

"SEE YOU ON THE BEACH"

From the million-selling Beach Head to pioneering games like Leaderboard, Links and the Tex Murphy series, Access Software was always ahead of the curve with its product line. Mike Bevan looks back on the legacy of Bruce Carver's celebrated company

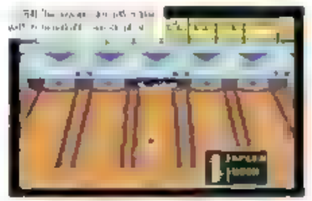
Steve Witzel recounts, "I actually sold Bruce Carver his first Commodore 64." This, we infer, was possibly the same machine used to create *Beach Head*, the game that first brought the Access Software brand fame and commercial success.

"I owned a retail computer store Computers Plus in Midvale, a suburb of Salt Lake City," Steve explains. "A lot of people with 64s were just hungry for information. People wanted to know everything about the inside of the machine and Commodore wasn't very forthcoming. Bruce was an engineer with a location called Reed Engineering, doing large construction projects, and he bought the 64 and really got interested in learning to program.

With his background in electrical engineering, Steve's knowledgeable demeanour meant that 64 owners were often coming into the store to glean technical information and swap programming tips for the machine. "Bruce wrote a little spreadsheet program and brought it in, and I gave him a few ideas and said, 'If you made a few adjustments, you know, we would sell this product in the store,' he recalls. "And he was quite surprised and went back and made those changes, and when we started selling the program, he got very excited.

It was, as they say, the beginning of a beautiful friendship. Bruce's program Spritemaster sold well enough to convince Steve that there might be something in this home computer programming lark specifically on the C64. "The Access Software brand was born with Spritemaster," says Steve. "Bruce kept doing his day job and started on his next game, his Star Trek-inspired 3D shooter called *Neutral Zone*. He came back and said, 'You know, I really don't know how to sell,' so we started a consulting relationship. I was helping him set up distribution networks, and then when the program started to sell, he came back and said, 'I'm having trouble copying the tapes. Our audio-dub cabinets just aren't working well enough.' We finally felt we had the big-name when I designed a little device for him that allowed him to copy six cassettes at once. We started getting quite a large distribution network and he decided to quit his day job, and the owners of Reed actually invested money in Access."

Co-founder of Access Chris Jones remembers, "In the early days, we worked out of Bruce's basement. While employed as an accountant at Reed Engineering, Chris partnered with Bruce in order to handle the business side of the company. "We were duplicating the games for distribution, designing box art, advertising, and everything. It was a true basement operation. When Bruce developed *Neutral Zone* it did reasonably well, which gave us some breathing room and we could bring others aboard to help with sales.



INSTANT EXPERT

- Access Software was founded by engineer Bruce Carver and business partner Chris Jones in Salt Lake City, Utah. The company was incorporated in November 1982 on a start-up budget of $4,000.
- The name Access was chosen after Bruce and his friends scanned through a dictionary looking for the perfect title for the business. Alternative names that were considered were Action Software and Center Soft.
- The company is best known for classics like *Beach Head*, *Red Over Moscow* and *Leaderboard*, the PC golf franchise *Links* and the critically acclaimed *Tex Murphy* detective noir adventure series, of which five games were released.
- In the UK, Access Software products were distributed by US Gold, starting with *Beach Head*. The UK-based distributor struck a deal with Ocean Software, which converted games like *Beach Head* and *Red Over Moscow* to the Spectrum and Amstrad CPC for the European market.
- The speech in the Commodore 64 version of *Beach Head II* was the voice of Doug Vandergrift, the artist who designed most of Access Software's packaging and was Art Director for the first two Tex Murphy games.

Although simplistic, *Neutral Zone* demonstrated a key aspect of Bruce's developing skill as a game designer – attention to detail and the integration of realistic physics – something that had been engrained in him through his time as an engineer. "Players fired projectiles that flew in a parabolic trajectory at enemy targets, a feature that would re-emerge in the most famous section of *Beach Head* along with *Neutral Zone*'s bitter-heavy explosion effects, born from his experiments with the C64's SID chip.

"We had talked about a game centred on a World War II concept, which eventually became *Beach Head*," recalls Chris. "That game was intended to be a bonus on the map. It also gave us an opportunity to get in with chain stores and major distributors."

Beach Head also marked the start of a profitable relationship with the UK-based distributor US Gold. The company would market many of Access Software's future products in Europe.

"I had this picture in my mind of the player shooting down enemy aircraft," Bruce stated in a 1987 interview with Commodore Magazine. "Once I had thought out the anti-aircraft idea, everything else revolved around that central theme. [Chris and I] were both old war movie fans, and *Beach Head* was the perfect outlet for our imaginations. It allowed us to take our favourite film scenes, translate them to graphics and actually participate in the action."

"*Beach Head* C64 was the game that stands out for me personally," says US Gold's founder Geoff Brown. "I doubt I believe now fantastic it looked with smooth animation and very realistic graphics. The gameplay was like nothing I had ever seen in the UK, streets ahead of the competing UK product. I seem to remember guaranteeing to sell 100,000 units ... eventually sold over a million. Bruce Carver shook my hand and the game shook up the UK C64 market. A few days after, took me to a UK games show where the whole stand was just a portable stereo with a C64 running the game ... Small Anirog units of Anirog Sinclair were coming to look at the game and telling me later that he went back to his guys and told them to scrap everything they were working on. The bar had been raised."

> **"US Gold believed that any publicity was good publicity"**
> CHRIS JONES

With *Beach Head*, Bruce seemed to have hit on a sure-fire design formula: linking a collection of diverse game sequences with a military-inspired storyline, dressed with what were for half-time cutting-edge graphics. And despite receiving some input from Chris and Steve, Bruce a renowned perfectionist, would do all the coding and graphics on his early C64 games by himself.

"The only artist we had on staff was Doug Vandergrift," says Steve. "He was part-time and still worked at Reed's and did all the covers for the Access games so, yes, the last five or six years. He was actually an Emmy award-winning artist."

Access's next game repeated this successful multi-game approach, moving from the D-Day-inspired setting of *Beach Head* to a rather more controversial Cold War themed action game. With a ludicrous plot on par with the John Milius movie *Red Dawn*, *Red Over Moscow* saw you sinking back at the Russian capital in a jet fighter, out in order to prevent nuclear bombardment from those pesky Soviets. It's easy to look back at the game as a bit of harmless fun, but it's worth remembering that following the shooting down of an unarmed Korean airliner by a Russian jet in 1983 and the country's invasion of Afghanistan, US-Soviet relations were extremely sensitive to say the least.

US Gold believed that any publicity was good publicity," says Chris. "They felt that they could get the product noticed on the map by protesting in front of the Russian Embassy in London. This was during the Reagan years, so there was high tension between the US and Russia. However, the controversy did get us noticed and helped prop up sales. And since it didn't ignite a war, I guess it worked out." The game was another hit for Access, despite the negative reaction, especially in Finland, where panicked owners debated it on par amount as in Germany, where Access was forced to re-title it simply *Red*.

More controversial to actual players was the opening of the game, where you had to wiggle the mouse controls of your ship while pressing a particular key to open the hangar doors of the launch bay. To my mind they made a few things too hard.

REMEMBERING BRUCE CARVER

"Bruce was a multi-tasker," says his brother Roger. "As we grew, he did less programming, but he was always involved with design. In the end, he didn't have the time to program. He was a great manager of people and a great designer. It wasn't an emotionally [illegible] system, but have everything worked. He could really do anything."

"Bruce was a great family man, had a wonderful sense of humour and was a tough competitor in any game that we played," adds Chris Jones. "In terms of the business, he was incredibly smart and multi-talented and could do all the art, music and programming for the games.

"I was always amazed at how the images on the screen felt as three-dimensional in the environments that we were most [illegible] to an effective simulating game. Massive amounts of engineering and time art allowed him to create illusions that were [illegible] convincing. We would come up with a game design and then he would build it from there.

"The only way one person could accomplish this was to be here with an unbelievable work ethic, and Bruce could work anyone under the table. He was truly one of a kind."

Bruce Carver taping Roger's gill using his toolchest

"We started by filming my swing against a brick wall with a VHS camera"

ROGER CARVER

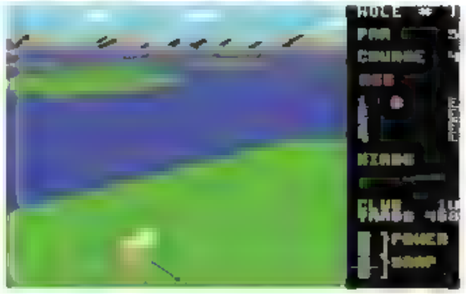
▶ reasons Steve. It was too hard to get out of the hangar at the start of the game. People just wanted to play and have fun.

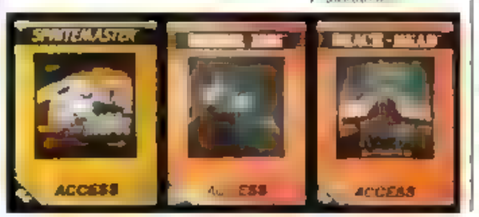
Meanwhile, Bruce had talked with his brother Roger, a US Navy programmer working on mainframe flight simulators, about joining the company. His first assignment was creating the display screen for *Raid Over Moscow*. It was the fifth employee at Access, if you include Bruce and Chris Jones, adds Brent Erickson, who also joined the company that year. Roger Carver was hired as well as Kevin Holder. We worked out of the top floor of the Hard Engineering building."

Bruce and Roger were definitely "[illegible]" says Brent. "From my perspective, Bruce would [illegible] technical aspects anything involving lots of math or complicated logic, and Roger would focus on things like an inertial system or game mechanics. It's nearly impossible to pin it down like that, however, because we all just did what was needed."

At the time, the technical information about how to use the hardware sprites on the C64 was not well known. "I don't even think the C64 programmer's reference manual had been published," Bruce says. It's a lot of time just plugging values into registers to figure out what it would do. That curiosity was probably the true catalyst to Access's formation." Roger was an enthusiastic golfer and really helped make *Leaderboard* and *Links* feel and look right.

On their way to the [illegible] greens of *Leaderboard*, Roger and Bruce teamed up for another bout of military shenanigans with *Beach Head II: The Dictator Strikes Back*. More accomplished than its predecessor with better long-term playability, impressive and sometimes [illegible] graphics, spliced speech and an excellent two-player mode, the game garnered Access their best reviews yet. This included a 96 per cent score and Similar award from Zap 64. It marked another technical breakthrough: the title screen of the opening stage had been animated using real-life footage of Bruce, Roger and Chris running around a local park. Translated from still frames of video tape, a technique later used to create the field animation in *Leaderboard*. Unfortunately, *Beach Head II* didn't sell as well as the original game, or *Raid Over Moscow*, leading Bruce and Roger to wonder if war-based games had finally run their course.





By this point, Steve Witzel had closed his computer store in order to work on a full-time basis at Access. He started on technical projects like the Mac 5 "estimator" cartridge for the C64 before moving into a marketing management role. *Leaderboard* was Bruce's idea, he reveals, revealing the origin of Access's famous golfing sim. Believe *Leaderboard*, he and Roger did a bowling game called *Bit Frame*, and Bruce spent a good [illegible] on the mathematics because of his engineering background. By the time he went into *Leaderboard*, that was his forte – the ball flight dynamics and physics of the game. At the beginning, it really set it apart from other games.

"It certainly did. *Leaderboard* was a revolutionary progression for sport simulations, from its control system to its pioneering three-dimensional terrain mapping, cramming a staggering amount of course data into the humble C64. There were other golf games, but they were all done from an overhead perspective," Chris comments. "Bruce wanted to do it from a golfer perspective."

"We started by filming my swing against a brick wall with a VHS camera," remembers Roger. "The process was: project and trace. He would [illegible] one by frame onto clear plastic, then [illegible] the sprite system of the C64. It took me weeks."

While I worked on that, Bruce wrote our first ball flight code. When we added the golfer and ball flight on a static background, we were amazed how real it looked. In fact, I remember [illegible] Bruce and I looked at each other and grinned. I'm not sure we even said anything. It was at that moment that *Leaderboard* was born."

While Bruce's programming and Roger's visual elegance gave us own programs, he added, other Access projects showed similar innovation. Steve Witzel designed a miniature robot-building kit. The Robotic Workshop introduced a control unit that plugged into a C64 and was years ahead of its time. Brent Erickson created the 3D shooter *Echelon*, a game that was perhaps overly ambitious for its initial platform.

"We had been developing 3D technology for *Leaderboard* and wanted to do a game

[illegible]

somewhere else. *Battlezone* isn't what we had," says Brent. "After several iterations, *Echelon* emerged as a futuristic space combat game. *Echelon* was one of the first true 3D games for the C64. I think the only other at the time was *Elite*. We moved to display objects and terrain at a large distance, so I came up with a technique that would allow us to project objects at a distance and still have a fast update well relatively as [illegible] we were at [illegible]. The other challenge was putting all the data together. This was all done by hand using large sheets of graph paper."

One of *Echelon*'s most notable innovations was the [illegible] still a headset device that allowed players to communicate with the game's navigational computer and fire weapons. "That was my idea," says Steve. "We added the headset because C64 software was starting to phase down and the IBM PC was starting to take hold. Market share was dwindling and the C64 really sold a lot of units."

To counter the C64's marketplace slide, Access Software had begun converting its games to other platforms such as the Apple II and Atari 400/800 and ST, while US Gold had been busy porting *Beach Head*, *Raid Over Moscow* and others to the Spectrum and Amstrad CPC. *10th Frame*, *Echelon* and golfing sim of *World Class Leaderboard* were the first batch of Access titles to receive PC conversions. The latter two releases included a technically remarkable system called RealSound that allowed primitive PCs to play digitised speech.

"RealSound was my only patent," says Steve Witzel. "This was in the days before sound cards – all had was the speaker that just beeped and everyone said it was impossible. We ended up selling it to a company that licensed RealSound to forty countries for a bunch of applications ▶

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Bruce Carver

Through his work leading some of Access Software's most famous titles, from Beach Head to Links, Bruce Carver gained a reputation as one of the industry's most prolific licensed designer-programmers. In 1997 PC Gamer awarded him the accolade of one of the "Gods of Gaming". He remained at the company he founded until 2003 before returning to the construction industry with his venture Carver Homes. Bruce passed away suddenly from cancer on 28 December 2009. He was 54 years old.

Brent Erickson

Brent currently shares his time between managing software and firmware teams at audio technology specialist Harman, working on automotive simulations for racing enthusiasts (www.simulationsoftware.com), and teaching programming at a Salt Lake City college. He uses computers to dabble with game design, creating a diagnostic on Steve's Drag Racing for a local software business development company, in XL 2.

Steve Witzel

Steve is still innovating, designing hardware and software systems to help hearing and sight impaired individuals and force-feedback equipment for live theatre performances for a company called Sound Associates. Another of his recent projects is MyBlueBlast, a portable power source for charging iPhone, iPod/iPhone and Android devices (www.solarpowerproducts.com).

Chris Jones

Chris will be familiar to a generation of gamers as the face of Jim Murphy, having played the character through all five sides in the series. He is currently working with Greenwater Animation on a new Kickstarter-funded *Jim Murphy adventure: Deep Effect*, while stepping into the shoes of the iconic donning detective yet again in the game's live action video sequences.

Roger Carver

As Chris, Roger continues to be involved in the staff at the Access subsidiary that spun off from the company after the Microsoft buyout in 1999. The company produces large screen Virtual Golf Simulators, building on technology and expertise gained through the design of the *Leaderboard* and *Links* franchises.

DEFINING GAMES

Beach Head

[illegible]

Raid Over Moscow

[illegible]

Beach Head II

[illegible]

Leaderboard

[illegible]

Links: The Challenge Of Golf

[illegible]

Under A Killing Moon

[illegible]

TIMELINE

1982 BRUCE CARVER CREATES SHERLOCK HOLMES AND BEGINS SELLING IT IN STEVE WOZNIAK'S COMPUTER STORE. ACCESS FOR WORLD'S FAIRS IN NOVEMBER THAT YEAR

1983 ACCESS'S FIRST GAME, THE TWO-ZONE ADVENTURE PLUNDERED IN BEACH-HEAD WINS PROVES A PHENOMENAL SUCCESS. ACCOLADES ARRIVE FROM THE MEDIA AND PASS ON EUROPE

1984 BRUCE CARVER ATTEMPTS TO REPEAT THE SUCCESS OF BEACH-HEAD WITH A NEW CONTROVERSIAL COLD WAR INSPIRED PAID OVER MISCOW. THE SUCCESS PUBLISHED GAMES INCLUDE THE SECRETS OF ABADON. ROGER CARVER JOINS THE COMPANY

1985 BEACH-HEAD II: THE DICTATOR STRIKES BACK. RIPS STORIES AUTHOR AND DEPTH HAVE REVIEWED IN THE GAMING PRESS

1986 BRUCE CARVER DESIGNS THE FIRST PC BOWLING SIMULATION, 10TH FRAME. PRICE TO THE TRADE OF THE HIGHLY ACCLAIMED WASHBURN LATER THAT YEAR

1987 EUROPEAN AND WORLDWIDE PASS ARE REGULARLY RECEIVED AND BUILT GAMES ARE PORTED TO THE PC

1989 TEX MURPHY MAKES HIS FIRST APPEARANCE IN MEAN STREETS

1990 ACCESS PUBLISHES ITS FIRST VGA ONLY TITLE LINKS, THE GOLF THAT IS GOLF

1991 THE FIRST CD-ROM BASED TEX MURPHY ADVENTURE, MIDPA KIL, INSPIRED BY THE 1970'S

1993 THE LAST TEX MURPHY GAME, OVERSEER, IS DISTRIBUTED ON CD-ROM

1994 MICROSOFT BUYS ACCESS SOFTWARE AND IT IS INTEGRATED INTO THE MICROSOFT GAME STUDIO. CORE FOCUS ASSAULT CARE GAMES STUDIO

2003 MICROSOFT RENAMES THE STUDIO INDIE GAMES

2004 TAKE TWO INTERACTIVE PURCHASES THE STUDIO FROM MICROSOFT AND IS RENAMED INDIE BUILT

2006 TAKE TWO SHUTS DOWN INDIE BUILT, BRINGING THE VERY 20 YEARS OF PIONEERING GAME DEVELOPMENT TO A CLOSE

"In the early days, we worked out of Bruce's basement"

CHRIS JONES

▶ Access's final C64 title, *Mean Streets*, was another ambitious offering that jumped to the PC platform using a modified version of the *Echelon* 3D engine and featuring striking digitised graphics and speech courtesy of RealSound. It introduced an enigmatic new hero named Tex Murphy.

We felt *Echelon* had done reasonably well for us as a product and we were looking for a way to expand the usage, explains Chris. "The idea we kicked around was having a purpose in the flight-sim. For example, we started the player off anywhere on the West Coast. This evolves into having a detective storyline behind it, and that's how Tex Murphy came to be. While we started out trying to do a flight-sim, by the time the product went out it was more of an adventure."

Mean Streets was when Chris really took on a more creative role, says Brent. "It was right in line with his interests as a kid. He and Doug used to make movies as young kids and screen them for their family. In fact we made a movie at Access, *Pain (Dragon Outer Space)*, that had most of us taking on various acting roles.

"We did a huge launch at the Academy Awards, at Arts and Sciences building in Beverly Hills," remembers Steve. "We had a lot of Hollywood celebrities show up for that because we were trying to as an interactive movie and they were all interested in where this computer thing was going." The fact that *Mean Streets* cast of characters were disguised from real actors indeed gave it an impressive cinematic flavour, while Chris himself stepped into the role of Tex – one that he would reprise a further four times.

With years of experience working on the Leaderboard games, Access was about to take another brave step into the PC software market. Bruce and Chris had a lot of conversations after Leaderboard came out," says Steve. "The C64 sales were sinking – everyone was moving to the PC but Bruce was dragging his feet because it was 16 colours at a time. We had a long talk after a CES and I said, 'Bruce, we need to come up with the first VGA-only game and we need to do it as VGA-only.' That game was Links. The challenge of Golf, the series debut of what would become the best-selling PC golf franchise ever. At the time most PC games also supported the older EGA mode, leading to a compromise in visual quality, being allotted exclusively to the higher end VGA graphics cards. Links was considerably better-looking than any other golf game on the market. "We sold a lot of copies to people that wanted to show off their computers because it was just gorgeous," says Steve.

"Bruce's goal was to get the terrain within two inches of what it was in the actual courses. I did get in trouble with him with one of the versions which had St Andrews. Links had this great terrain feature and I said, 'Why are you doing St Andrews?' It's flat.' He really got mad about that. I guess it's like the Mecca of golf," Links went on to become the flagship franchise for Access Software, throughout the nineties with dozens of expansion packs and course accounts being released.

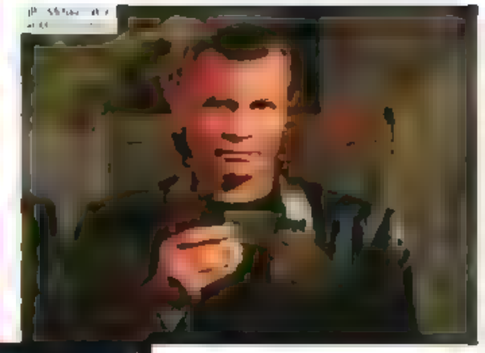
The Tex Murphy series continued with Martian Memorandum, which was followed by *Under A Killing Moon* and *The Pandora Directive*, both of which featured 3D environments coupled with extensive video sequences and Hollywood talent like Kevin McCarthy, Margot Kidder and James Earl Jones. "Some of them were big names that had seen their day," reflects Steve. "Affordable but recognisable. Some of the actors were interesting, even with Jonathan Wright. and he was the actor – I thought he guy was going to die on us – but as soon as the camera turned on he just went for it." The final game in the franchise, *Tex Murphy: Overseer*, a remake of the original *Mean Streets*, was released in 1998.

Although Links and Tex remained a principle source of income, Access began to consider another way of ensuring its survival. "We started investigating the option of going public," explains Steve, "but we saw a lot of companies doing something similar only to lose a ton of money and go out of business, so we were a little cautious. But Microsoft came to us before the launch of Windows and asked us to do a golf game, and we started a long relationship. It got to the point where we had to be on Windows only and drop platforms like the Mac, so we said we'd differentiate between our game, Links, and their game, Microsoft Golf.

"That came to a head one day when USA Today reviewed both games and rated ours superior to Microsoft's. The games were virtually identical in performance, but our marketing was better which gained us more recognition in the press. Finally they said, 'Look, we just want to buy the company.' And I think it was really the right time for Access because we didn't have the deep pockets to go after the likes of Tiger Woods and we didn't have the marketing budget to be on multiple platforms. A lot of people thought that with Microsoft behind us we would really start to sell a lot."

The buyout was completed in 1999, with Access becoming a satellite of Microsoft Game Studios, but the hope of massive sales gains never materialised. Bruce Carver continued work on the Links series until leaving in 2003 to form the construction company Carver Homes. In 2004, Microsoft sold the studio to Take-Two Interactive, which renamed the company Indie Built. Indie produced Amped 2 and the series swansong Top Spin 2 for the Xbox 360 before sadly closing in 2006.

Today, the Access legacy lives on in Truegolf – where Chris, Roger and other former employees still work – a subsidiary that accepted the Microsoft buyout and designs big-screen golf simulators for home and corporate use. In 2007, Chris Jones and Aaron Conners formed Big Fish Games and began the process of touting a possible sixth Tex Murphy adventure – with the working title *Project Fedora* – to publishers. On 6 June 2012, a Kickstarter campaign by Big Fish successfully raised funding for the new game after $584,104 was pledged by backers, easily surpassing the company's $400,000 goal. And so begins a whole new adventure for Chris and several other Access alumni. As this issue of **RG** went to press, Big Fish announced that the new game would be called *Tesla Effect*, and appears to be loosely around aspects of the work of the famous Austrian physicist and inventor Nikola Tesla. It's been a long time coming, but the fedora will most definitely be back.



TESLA EFFECT: CHRIS JONES Q&A

Why did you decide that the time was right to revive Tex Murphy?

We had tried reviving Tex Murphy several times since the cliffhanger in *Overseer* in 1998. However, during that time adventure games had fallen out of favour for games that were more "casual-friendly". Aaron Conners and I had approached several publishers since that time to bring Tex back, but no one was interested. When Double Fine had its great success with crowdfunding their adventure through Kickstarter, we knew we had to try this method to revive Tex. We have a hardcore following of Tex fans who have stuck with us over the years, and they were the ones made the Kickstarter campaign a success. We are very thankful to them for helping us achieve our dream of bringing Tex back.

Were you surprised at the reaction from fans over the Kickstarter project?

Frankly, we were gratified. It had been a long time since the last game and we weren't sure what sort of reception our Kickstarter campaign would receive. By the time *Overseer* debuted, not only had the popularity of adventure games diminished, but games that used FMV also suffered greatly in the mainstream gaming world. To have people clamoring for Tex to come back was a complete thrill for us.

What can we expect from the new game?

You're going to see very good performances by accomplished acting talent, a rich story on an epic scale and three different paths/experiences taking you through the game. It's not merely a matter of three different endings, but three different experiences that the player develops throughout the game. Rule Effect's story is funny, scary, compelling and, because a player gets varied information on each path, the game offers hours of re-playability.

SCORE 48,774

2 WAVE

SHIELD GONE

CLASSIC VIDEO GAME

Star Wars

PLATFORM: ARCADE DEVELOPER: ATARI RELEASED: 1983

It took Atari ten years to recreate the classic Death Star trench run, but by goodness was it worth the wait. Thanks to the successful Return Of The Jedi, which was on worldwide cinema release, gamers eagerly leapt at the chance to participate in the original film's great climax. The result is one you made your way through the tank, was total with straight-ahead shots you only had to deal with the gun emplacements and the odd fireball. Things got more tricky in later runs however, with massive barriers that would force you to duck and weave as you desperately tried to keep hold of your precious shields. Later games may have been more realistic, particularly Star Wars: Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader on the GameCube, but the original wire-frame version remains our favourite.

BIO

Atari had made Star Wars had everything you wanted from a hit arcade game. It had stunning wire-frame visuals, excellent controls and an amazingly frantic pace. Best of all though, it was based on one of the best science fiction films of all time, effortlessly capturing the thrills and spills of Star Wars's epic space battles. Needless to say, gamers flocked to it, eager to experience the thrilling trench run and get the opportunity to mow down scores of TIE Fighters. It remains one of the best games based on the licence. High praise indeed, considering how many Star Wars games there are.

MORE CLASSIC STAR WARS MOMENTS

"That's no moon, it's a space station"

While the Death Star trench run is one of the best moments in Star Wars, blowing up the actual Death Star is a close second. While you don't have to worry about being chased by Darth Vader, you do have to aim the Death Star's reflector port. Miss and you have to face your enemy in the flesh, however, and you're pulled back into the trench in fashion. Once you're a safe distance away, it explodes.

"Don't get cocky"

One of the best parts of Star Wars is facing off against TIE fighters. The wire-frame ships are impressively moody and, while the first waves are simple to shoot, they get harder and harder to shoot down as the game progresses. You'll cope with it though, as the satisfaction you get from shooting them down is enormous. You even get a crack at Darth Vader's ship, but unfortunately it can't be destroyed.

"May the force be with you"

Shooting down TIE fighters is all very well and good, but if you want to be really cool you might want to take down the actual firepolls that are firing at you. Probably the toughest task in the game, and becoming increasingly difficult on later trench runs, you'll need amazing reflexes to take them down, and as they increase in number you'll find your wrist even more curved. A great way to show off your skills when playing in the arcades.

"Use the force, Luke"

One of the neatest moments from Star Wars is nothing more than a hardware trick. On later stages, just before you approach the actual trench, you'll find yourself in large open areas shooting down red blocks or all yellow towers, both of which suddenly become rebels. This comprises of a fair amount of time, with the Millennium Falcon spinning and rotating into the actual Death Star trench.

ODDWORLD

THE HISTORY OF

With a remake on the way, David Crookes talks to Lorne Lanning about the impact of Abe's Oddysee and the rest of a series that just fell short of its planned quintology

A character who can break wind is always a winner. Even if that character is an alien with bulbous, bloodshot eyes, a high ponytail of hair made from feathers and a skinny, almost malnourished torso; the ability to let one go, while undoubtedly disgusting, is yet all too endearing to ignore.

May not be a tool employed by many other gaming characters, but perhaps Sonic Mario and even Lara could give it a go. Then again, they have not quite endured the life of Abe, star of the *Oddworld* games, whose battleworn would make noses bleed from all but the toughest of authors.

Abe's days are spent scrubbing floors and suffering heartless beatings from Sligs, the backbone of a repressive society's industrial security team. Things take a bitter sweet turn when Abe accidentally discovers that he and his fellow Mudokon workers are not merely slaves, but fodder for the machines used at the vast Rupture Farms food processing plant where they toil each day.

Luckily for us, that Abe emerges as the chosen one and is able to pursue the ousting of dictator Molluck the Glukkon and his evil regime, thereby freeing the downtrodden from their horrific plight.

Today, such determination to stick one to The Man and spark an uprising would undoubtedly involve Twitter, technology-free Abe treads a rather more conventional path, stomping around a food meeting other slaves in person and cheerily urging them to follow me – but not too closely, you would hope.

From a story perspective, all of the *Oddworld* stories were inspired from the dirty deeds of the dark side of globalisation, explains Lorne Lanning, who co-founded American developer Oddworld Inhabitants with fellow special effects and computer animator expert Sherry McKenna. "And it was the stories that convinced Sherry to get involved and do this whole thing with me."

Work began on the plot in January 1995. "We took big inspiration from Flashback, *Out Of This World* and *Myst* and it worked well," Lorne continues. "We started to create an intriguing world. Ideas were bounced off designer Paul O'Connor and the crew to work out what would work and what could be altered should production hit any issues."

Originally, the idea was to call the game SoulStorm, but other games at the time had the word 'Soul' in them, so a new moniker was found to avoid confusion. There were also initial thoughts over making the game 3D, but this was scrapped in favour of 2D, even though the advent of the 32-bit consoles showed a market going the other way.

The game drew on the gaming styles of old – right down to an 8-bit, flick-screen mind and – and that was due to Lorne's belief that there was still mileage left in 2D gaming. Lorne had also been working with 3D for the previous decade and didn't believe the crop of 3D games on the PlayStation were outstanding enough to prompt a switch.

Still, the assets were built in 3D. The backgrounds for the game were pre-rendered and this, in a sense, produced 2.5D with [illegible] for

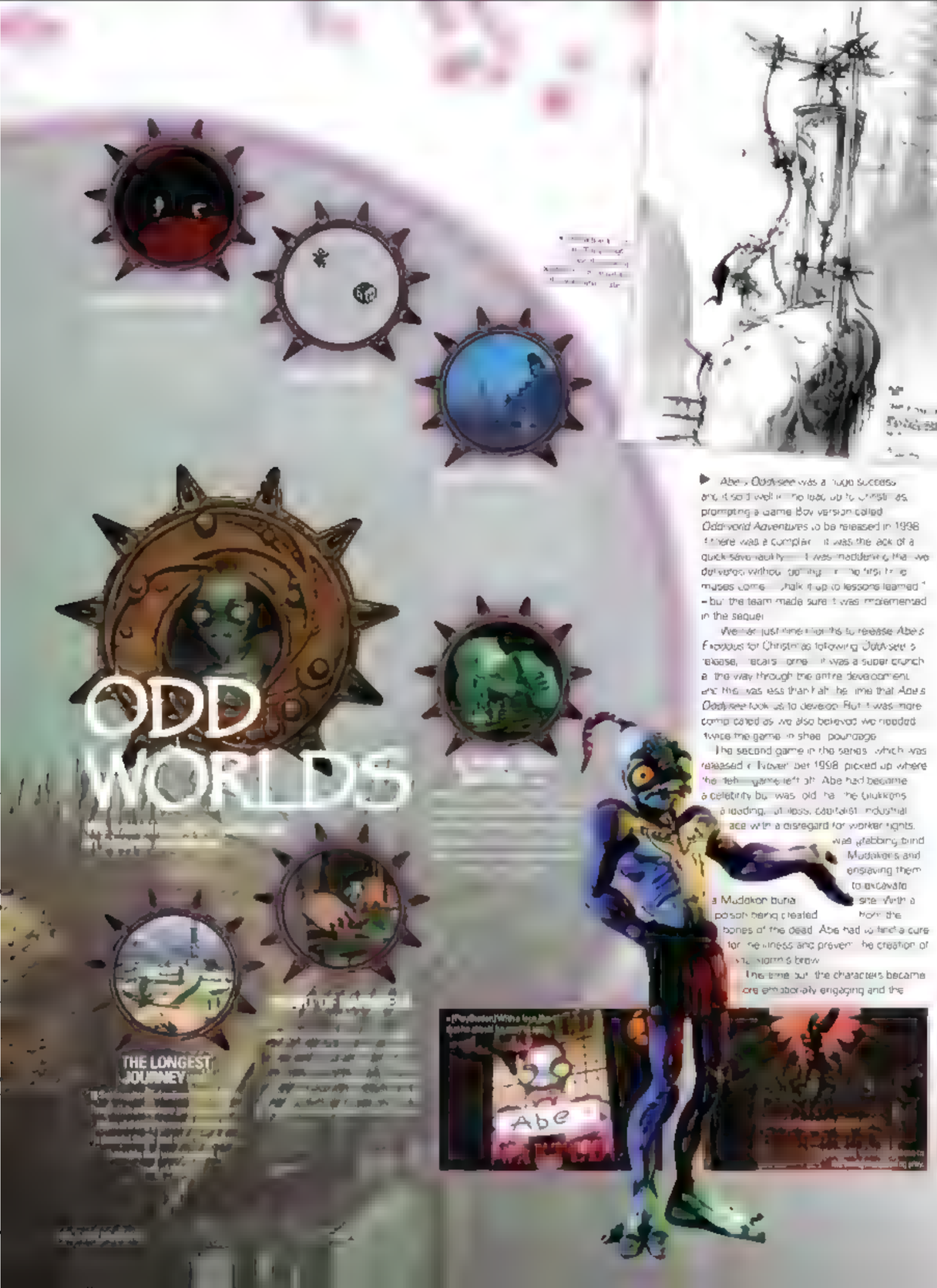
image depth and detail. "We didn't want to launch 'low poly world' to establish the first impression of the *Oddworld* Universe," Lorne says, revealing that the plan to build a live-par story – "The *Oddworld* Quintology" – was foremost in his mind.

As well as beautiful visuals and slick cut-scenes that blended into the gameplay, a major part of *Oddworld* was the feature Gamespeak, that allowed Abe to talk, whistle and, yes, fart, and it was crucial for gameplay and/or humour. Seldom failing to raise a smile, it was seen as so important that it was included in the demo. Lorne hawked around to publishers to whip up interest and investment in the game.

The debut title also had an artificial intelligence routine called Aware Reflexive Environments or ALIVE for short. This commanded the actions of the game's creatures according to the situation they were faced with and the type of character they were. Abe could therefore decide to solve some puzzles and ignore others, and the mayor could even trick Sligs into shooting each other.

Abe could also chant and possess other characters, using them to solve puzzles or carry out a killing. Although Lorne wanted snooping in the game he didn't want Abe to have a twitchy trigger finger himself, and this was a way around such a situation. Keen watchers will also note incidentally that Abe had four fingers in the debut game but only three thereafter – this was to avoid causing offence in Japan, where four-fingered characters are banned out of respect for meat-packing workers who often lost fingers in work-related accidents. Abe's Oddysee progressed well and was earmarked for a PlayStation and PC release ▶

ODD WORLDS



▶ Abe's Oddysee was a huge success and it sold well in the lead up to Christmas, prompting a Game Boy version called *Oddworld Adventures* to be released in 1998. "There was a complaint – it was the lack of a quick save feature," recalls Lorne. "It was maddening that we delivered without doing it in the first place. The muses come – chalk it up to lessons learned" – but the team made sure it was implemented in the sequel.

We were just nine months to release Abe's Exoddus for Christmas following Oddysee's release, recalls Lorne. "It was a super crunch all the way through the entire development and this was less than half the time that Abe's Oddysee took us to develop. But it was more complicated as we also believed we needed twice the game in sheer poundage."

The second game in the series, which was released in November 1998, picked up where the first game left off. Abe had became a celebrity but was sold by the Glukkons to a leading, ruthless, capitalist industrial place with a disregard for worker rights. Abe was stabbing blind Mudokons and enslaving them to excavate a Mudokon burial site. With a poison being created from the bones of the dead, Abe had to find a cure for the illness and prevent the creation of the storm's brew.

This time, but the characters became more elaborately engaging and the pace picked up. Gamespeak instructions were used to command Mudokons at the same time, and Mudokons found it harder to follow Abe because many of them were blind. "Overall, it was about giving the game a further level of polish, depth and challenge."

Our approach to the game was pretty much compatible with how you would approach a film," says Lorne. "With both you start with a script, but we then added an additional layer of game mechanics that we knew we wanted to implement or evolve upon.

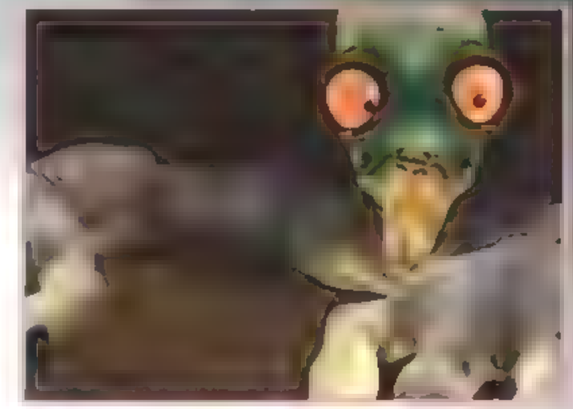
"So starting with these two key high-level components, we worked them up simultaneously. We integrated the script tightly against the ramping of mechanics – gameplay. Our target was continually working to try to find a lighter vision of narrative. It was not only engaging as a story, but was also informative and foreshadowing of new play mechanics that would be coming up next for the gamer."

The first game had a heads-up display, but this was dropped for the sequel. "It was a goal of mine – only to eliminate any menu elements that broke the reality horizon," Lorne explains. "Heating Gui elements reinforce for you this is a game, and for the original Abe games we wanted to get away from that impression and instead rely on instil the sensation of the player being responsible for these people living in this world."

In trying to remove all traces of the traditional heads-up display, Oddworld inhabitants attempted to find more clever, subtle methods of communicating necessary information and tried to do it in more logical ways so that it felt more like a film. "We wanted the elements to feel like they were within the world rather than a HUD layered over the world," Lorne continues. "It was attempting to accomplish a deeper impression of a living, breathing adventure, rather than just a gaming adventure."

The emotions helped bring the creatures to life. "The second game had more entertainment value as well as a stronger emotional relationship to these silly little characters," says Lorne. "We always want you to laugh when you're playing our games, regardless of how dark their subject matter is."

And dark is a good description. Much of that is down to Lorne himself. He is a doodle artist who, with the Oddworld series of games, was aiming to craft a gameplay and story experience that drew on a sense of injustice festering in the back of his mind. It was a concept for disturbing human rights abuses by powerful corporations from the sweatshop docks of Bangladesh to the diamond or gold mines in South America and South Africa. He wanted Oddworld to have a dark premise but



[illegible] Abe's Oddysee

[illegible] Abe's Exoddus

follow the lead set by *The Simpsons* and *The Daily Show*, both of which refrain from getting up on a soapbox like them. He did not want to use sight of Oddworld as entertainment and believed that humour and narrative would combine to raise important issues.

He denies that the series is political. "Personally, I think politics are for chumps," he says. "It's for suckers who still believe they have people fighting for their interests in the greater halls of power and, after years of trying to see that their world would be heroes have been completely compromised. But he talks of an insane elite class of global sits actively ruining the planet for the rest of us and for their own short-term power gains.

"It was always these practises that inspired the content of Oddworld, as these stories started taking shape 20 years ago." Lorne ▶

ODD ADVENTURES

Your guide to Abe and co's numerous retail releases

ABE'S ODDYSEE
DEVELOPER: ODDWORLD INHABITANTS
PUBLISHER: GT INTERACTIVE
PLATFORMS: PLAYSTATION, WINDOWS
YEAR: [illegible]

ABE'S EXODDUS
DEVELOPER: ODDWORLD INHABITANTS
PUBLISHER: GT INTERACTIVE
PLATFORMS: PLAYSTATION, WINDOWS
YEAR: [illegible]

ODDWORLD ADVENTURES
DEVELOPER: [illegible]
PUBLISHER: [illegible]
PLATFORM: GAME BOY
YEAR: [illegible]

ODDWORLD ADVENTURES 2
DEVELOPER: [illegible]
PUBLISHER: [illegible]
PLATFORM: GAME BOY COLOR
YEAR: [illegible]

MUNCH'S ODDYSEE
DEVELOPER: ODDWORLD INHABITANTS
PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
PLATFORM: XBOX
YEAR: [illegible]

MUNCH'S ODDYSEE
DEVELOPER: [illegible]
PUBLISHER: [illegible]
PLATFORM: GAME BOY ADVANCE
YEAR: [illegible]

STRANGER'S WRATH
DEVELOPER: ODDWORLD INHABITANTS
PUBLISHER: [illegible]
YEAR: [illegible]

continuous – so for me – took deep into the darkest practises of the Kleloc class in a constant search of vehicles to inspire action from these practises in an effort to transform that darkness into a launch point for some seriously relevant and deeply rooted modern-style humour.

Lorne's outlook had an effect on the types of enemies in the game that were always designed around how they would play. The Glukkons were inspired by the Kleloc class. Big shots bossing people around while ultimately being pretty useless behind the bankers, he says. New enemies were also introduced including Flying Dogs, Slugs, Mine Cars and Greeters. "They were all initially designed as challenges within our code teach. Then we interpreted the mechanics into themed characters," Lorne says.

Following yet another acclaim, Lorne and his team pushed on with the end of the planned five games. The loyalty to PlayStation had gone and *Munch's Oddysee* was being slated for an exclusive November 2001 release on the Xbox.

As with the other games, there were two endings. "We did this because we always wanted empathy to be a major factor in the game, but if you played the game without empathy, we wanted you to get an ending that reflected your personal character," says Lorne. "If you went through our journey as a heartless douche, we wanted to remind you what a schmuck you were being and how it would ruin the life of those you were supposed to be helping."

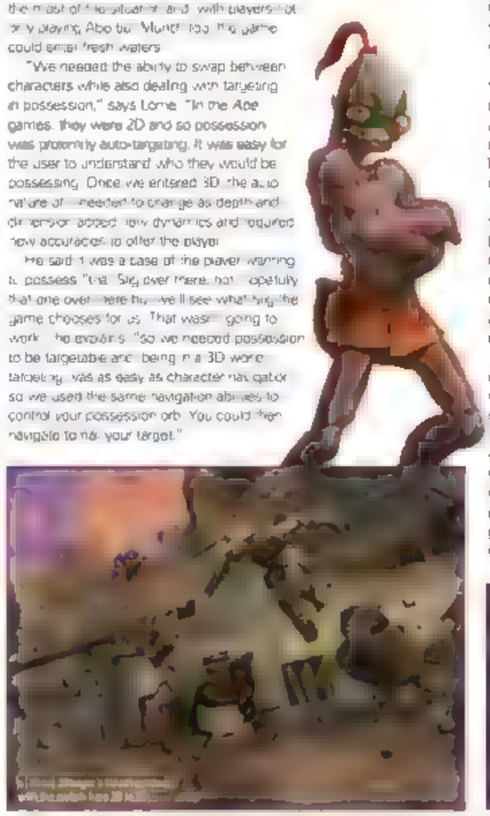
But this instalment was the first time *Oddworld* was rendered in three dimensions. At the time, everyone was enamoured with 3D and the gaming press was speaking of 3D as the only viable way. Lorne recalls: "It was sad to see all the games being left behind because they weren't using new chipsets. Regardless, if you wanted to keep getting funded, you needed to play with the tools and where the audience interests were heading, and by the time we got to the X box it was all about 3D. Otherwise you probably weren't getting funded."

The added third dimension was a challenge to capture what made Abe special in his awkwardness and abilities, yet have that embedded in a free roaming space. There was also a huge real-time 3D learning curve that all of the team was going through, but they made the most of the situation and, with players not only playing Abe but Munch too, the game could emerge fresh waters.

> "We always wanted empathy to be a major factor in the game"
>
> Lorne Lanning

"We needed the ability to swap between characters while also dealing with targeting in possession," says Lorne. "In the Abe games, they were 2D and so possession was primarily auto-targeting. It was easy for the user to understand who they would be possessing. Once we entered 3D, the auto nature of it needed to change as depth and dimension popped, new dynamics and required new accuracies to offer the player."

He said it was a case of the player warning to possess. "Hit Sligs over there, but – hopefully that one over here but – we'll see what thing the game chooses for us. That wasn't going to work," he explains. "So we needed possession to be targetable and, being in a 3D world, targeting was as easy as character navigation, so we used the same navigation abilities to control your possession orb. You could then navigate to hit your target."



The reviews were not as favourable for *Munch's Oddysee*, with some believing the puzzles lacked variation. Lorne has no complaints: "I always felt all of our puzzles were not varied enough, but these are challenges with puzzle games and the amount of code we were writing for each puzzle," he confesses. "Puzzle games are not very economical with code. Combine that with development environments that were unpredictable in terms of budgeting, and you found yourself in tight spots making lots of compromises."

The fourth game, *Stranger's Wrath*, however, was a superb return to form. Released in January 2005 in America, it was critically acclaimed. Had first and third-person perspectives and was also faster. The team wanted speed to be a factor in the third-person in particular, due to the character's nature and ability to run faster. Stranger could become a blur, moving higher or lower objects and, by increasing in speed, his mobility morphed into a motorcycle mode. He didn't ride as Lorne explains, "pivot on a dime with speed. He steered and leaned into turns and it allowed for him to cut corners faster and look more like a vehicle when controlled."

"This allowed us to have more retreat for higher ground ability if you were getting overwhelmed in a combat situation," says Lorne. "Now you could retreat and with enough speed to get past getting shot in the back – something I felt was very much missing out there for character-driven combat games."

Stranger's Wrath had an element of stealth too, designed true to the character's nature but also compounded the chemistry of choices that players were able to have at their disposal. It offered the gamer more choices in how to solve any combat situation. But another decision was made. *Stranger's Wrath* contained role-playing elements.

Action adventure games seemed inevitably heading toward a role-playing mode, at least at an accounting level, says Lorne: "The game was going to have a persistent economy, and one that your character needed to pursue in the narrative. Bled it needed to incorporate more modification and purchasability for the main character. Having this inherent in a system gives you many more things that you can make the gamer do for various reasons at various times, all of which are added tools available to the designers to help overall tailoring, while helping to decrease a potential monotony that can come with a game."

The fourth game became the last *Oddworld* title and the last game to not appear during prior the original portfolio. *Stranger's Wrath* had been published by Electronic Arts and, while Lorne doesn't go too deep, he says: "Our experience working with the last publisher pretty much annihilated any desire we might have had left in continuing to work with big publishers, which points to a potential issue."

Plans for other games came and went. Names such as *Oddworld: The Hand Of Odd*, *SligStorm*, *The Brutal Ballad Of Fangus Riot*, *Oddworld: Squeek's Oddysee*, *Oddworld: Munch's Exoddus* and *Oddworld: Slave Circus* were put forward over the years. And while a game may well have surfaced around 2008, the Western financial crisis and work on a new project called *Citizen Siege* caused a distraction.

Remakes and digital content appear to be the way forward for now, and the *Oddworld* franchise is being built organically and without financing. But it means that we can't cannot spend in the way we do, and it will take a while before the A contemporary content is released. "We've talked about a number of games that we've had ready to make," says Lorne. "Something which we're doing so know they are paid for."

It seems the appetite is still there, however. "We're very grateful for the way things have worked out but – like a lot of artists – we're always wanting to do better," he says. "We pray to God that at a low point in society rather than later."

THE NEW KEEPER OF ODDWORLD

Five years after Stranger's Wrath, the series was given a dust down by developer Just Add Water. We talk to founder and CEO Stewart Gilray about the HD remakes

You began working on the *Oddworld* franchise in May 2010. Were you a fan of the series and how did you get involved?

I'd met Lorne briefly at GDC 2009. He was one of my industry contemporaries and someone I'd always wanted to meet. Over the years I'd been asking a mutual friend to persuade Lorne to go back to doing a 2D-type game but with 3D assets – a remake of *Abe's Oddysee* or a game of a similar nature – but in June 2009, Lorne and [illegible] they'd been let down by another developer. He wanted us to look at *Stranger's Wrath* for the PC, and I said yes, as long as we could do a PS3 version. We began to work on *Stranger HD* for PS3 in late September 2009 while still working [illegible] the initial PC release of *Stranger*, which was a straight port from Xbox.

By the time of your involvement, the series had been stagnant for four years. Were there discussions about moving the series on?

There were no real discussions. It was a [illegible] project, and see where it leads to – and we've now released the initial PC release of *Stranger's Wrath*, three versions of *Stranger's Wrath HD*, two versions of *Munch's Oddysee HD* and we're working on the multi-platform remake of *Abe's Oddysee*, *Oddworld: New 'N' Tasty*. We only had two staff when we began the initial version but we have 16 now. The plan is we will continue and work on some proper [illegible]

There were promises of *SligStorm*, *Fangus Riot*, *Squeek's Oddysee* and some other games. What was happening and why were these games not getting off the ground?

When the original studio was closed in April 2006 it was because Lorne and Sherry McKenna had decided enough was [illegible] rate due to publisher/developer agreements [illegible] then, *Fangus Riot* was in development when that happened, so that was the main victim of what happened then. Lorne had been working on the story and design for *Squeek's Oddysee* as well, but – couldn't solve a problem he had with it so it kept – getting put on the back burner until that thing was solved. And *SligStorm* just didn't happen, mainly due to working on *Munch's Oddysee*.

What makes *Oddworld* such a special series of games?

[illegible] but most importantly the humour.

Is there still a place for 2D gaming in the modern era?

Why not? I think both pure 2D art and 3D art with 2D gameplay can still work very well – and we're showing that with *Oddworld: New 'N' Tasty*. I think the need for everything to be in 3D is always the right thing to do, there are better solutions if the design requires it.

The Young Ones

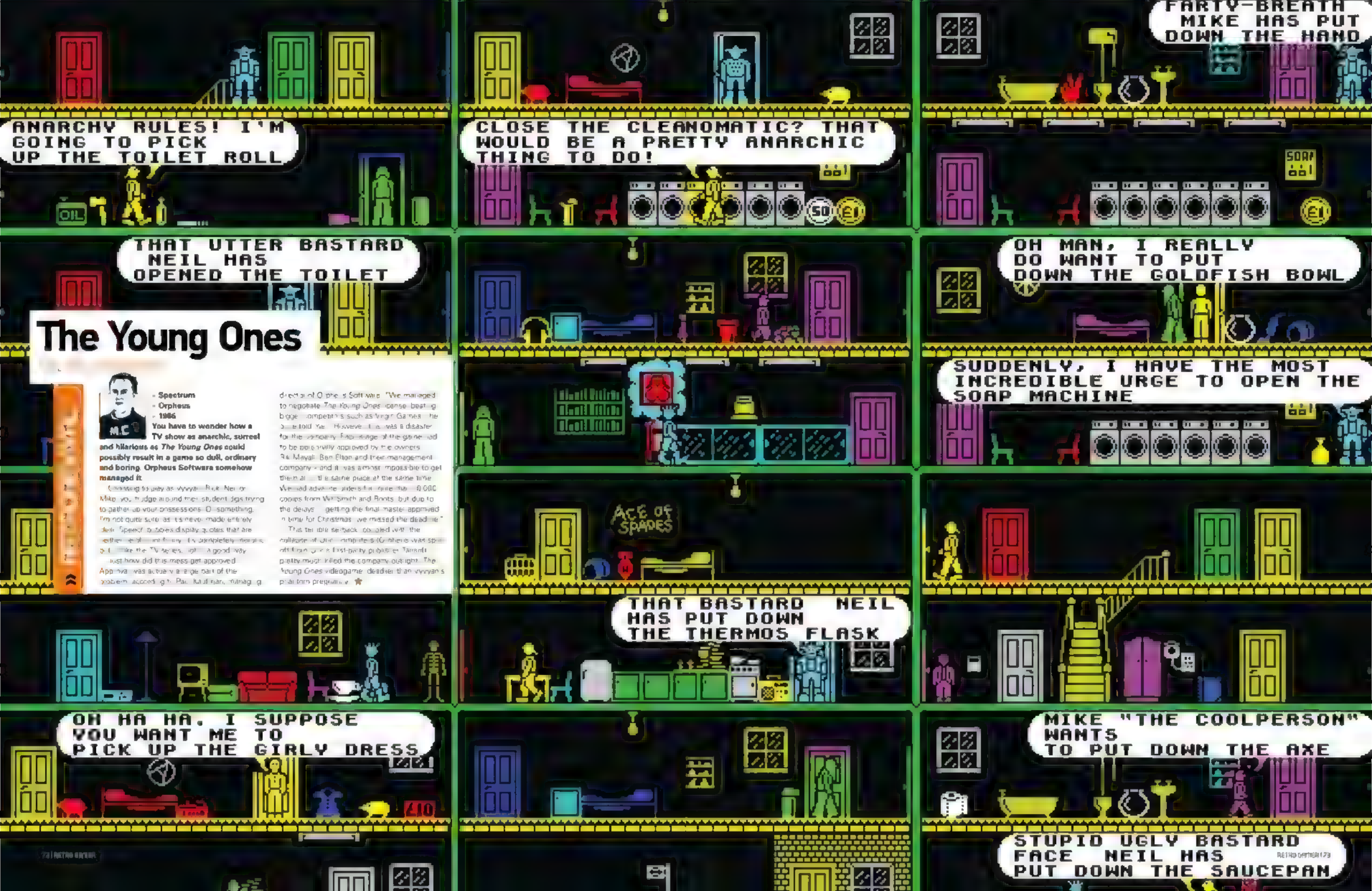
- Spectrum
- Orpheus
- 1986

You have to wonder how a TV show as anarchic, surreal and hilarious as *The Young Ones* could possibly result in a game so dull, ordinary and boring. Orpheus Software somehow managed it.

Choosing to play as Vyvyan, Rick, Neil or Mike, you trudge around their student digs trying to gather up your possessions. Or something. I'm not quite sure, as it's never made entirely clear. Speech bubbles display quotes that are either [illegible] or funny (it's completely [illegible] like the TV series, in a good way). Just how did this mess get approved?

Approval was actually a large part of the problem, according to Paul Kaufman, managing director of Orpheus Software. "We managed to negotiate *The Young Ones* license beating bigger competitors such as Virgin Games," he [illegible] told Yes. "However, this was a disaster for the company. Each stage of the game had to be personally approved by the owners Rik Mayall, Ben Elton and their management company – and it was almost impossible to get them all in the same place at the same time. We had advertised orders for more than 10,000 copies from WH Smith and Boots, but due to the delays – getting the final master approved in time for Christmas – we missed the deadline."

This terrible setback, coupled with the collapse of our computers (Orpheus was specialising in Commodore 64 and Amiga), pretty much killed the company outright. The *Young Ones* videogame, deadlier than Vyvyan's pillar from prepubescence. ★



Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come

37.

RED DEAD REDEMPTION

Rockstar Games managed to craft the greatest of open worlds, as well a mature and accomplished narrative that reignited the unfashionable Western genre

THE BACKGROUND

The most publicly notable part of *Red Dead Redemption*'s journey to completion is the scale it was announced in a largely different form alongside the PS3's mega-selling debut in 2006. It was informally referred to as a sequel to 2004's *Red Dead Revolver* some aspects of which made it into the far more ambitious sequel, notably the Dead Eye slow-motion combat mechanic.

The goal was to capture the essence of Western films on a grand scale – an open world backdrop that could enable every archetypal experience that a fan of that genre could ask for. Part pastiche and part expansion of Rockstar's existing sensibilities with creating open worlds – the latter shared by the prodigious *GTA IV* – the New York Times claimed that *Red Dead Redemption* cost almost $100 million to make, an investment that vastly outstripped most of Rockstar's industry contemporaries at the time.

It was a gigantic risk, really considering that the Western had more or less remained dormant within videogames and the wider culture landscape for many years – the original *Red Dead Revolver* only sold 3 million copies, a big enough number, of course, but a follow-up of *Red Dead*'s scale had to do a lot better to justify that sort of investment. It did. With 13 million copies sold, *Red Dead* asserted Rockstar's dominance of the open world genre beyond *GTA*.

THE GAME

A great open world has an effect on the player beyond spectacle and size. To consume hours of your time while you explore with no goal, enjoying the sunsets, creating gameplay moments in your own, across snowy mountains and wildlife-populated deserts. *Red Dead Redemption*'s sandbox was simply years ahead of its competitors. While Rockstar's output is contentious among some as to whether the publisher's games deserve such extraordinary levels of praise as amounts with *Red Dead* to create an open world that permits every kind of Wild West fantasy goes far beyond what even its own *GTA* series had previously accomplished.

Here, we have a gigantic world with its own ecosystem, random events and RPG-inspired depth to unravel. John Marston's story is technically set on the American/Mexican border, yet it compresses elements of the wider American wilderness into one massive summary of its most visually diverse areas. Travelling across the world, your knowledge of each region is formed by recognising landmarks and rock formations – no stretch of land feels wasted. It's the interactivity with this impressively consistent world that makes *Red Dead* so compelling. Its vast and ahead of its time within a genre that is still mostly restricted in the way you can affect the surrounding world.

Being able to hurl anything board every train, start a shootout in saloons, duel with strangers, anger wild creatures and lasso any NPC gives you constant motives to remain in this world, to play with the possibilities outside of the story missions. This is balanced by a smart morality system that decides you an outlaw or champion based on your actions – consequences, to bring weight to the chaos.

The environment feels handcrafted rather than big for the sake of it – let's say you're out in the middle of a desert and you've narrowly survived an encounter with wolves, just as the golden sun sets behind a wounded John Marston with his horse in the distance, you own that moment. That set of circumstances and bizarre sequence of events may never happen again, yet *Red Dead Redemption*'s astonishing number of those moments, more as dramatic in your direction and they will belong to you.

Yet the factor that underlines the success of those moments comes in the portrayal of John Marston himself as a rain-eyed, sympathetic and tragic figure being manipulated into chasing his past mistakes by a force of questionable morality. Rockstar's scriptwriting is industry-best and its the [illegible] deadpan of Marston as well as those who he encounters, that offers a whole other layer of investment for the player that a vocal narrative-heavy game could hope to replicate.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

Red Dead Redemption represents a high point in sandbox-based game design, storytelling and contemporising the Western for today's audience. Inspired by Unforgiven, Tombstone and many other cinematic sources, it's the high point of Rockstar's ongoing efforts to deconstruct America's cultural identity as well as a videogame built on so many sophisticated systems that it always offers a compelling reason to come back.

Rockstar's about to release *Grand Theft Auto V*, which will exceed the size and detail of *Red Dead*'s world considerably. Yet it's the amazing effort to create a convincing period piece that will always set *Red Dead* apart from the company's equally compelling other series. It's as if Rockstar's *GTA* with a Western theme slapped on it's part homage to a cornerstone of popular culture, part reinvention of a genre that Rockstar itself pioneered and a distinctive work that will remain relevant for years to come.

Things of note

Open season — Beyond the single-player, *Red Dead's* [illegible] *GTA* [illegible] the main fighting forts and other areas of the [illegible] to give [illegible]

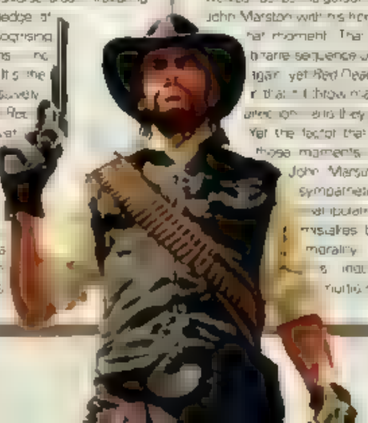
Man of war, man of peace — *Red Dead's* was sold as the pursuit of a moral [illegible] of a [illegible] mistaken, as John Marston's outlaw [illegible] the end.

Mexico and José González — *Red Dead's* [illegible] about [illegible] comes when Marston enters Mexico, and the accompanying transition to the other land with an original track by José González.

Horror comes West — [illegible] Dead we wonder how [illegible] the game's DLC [illegible] which adds a whole horror-themed (and amazing) campaign for a mere £7.

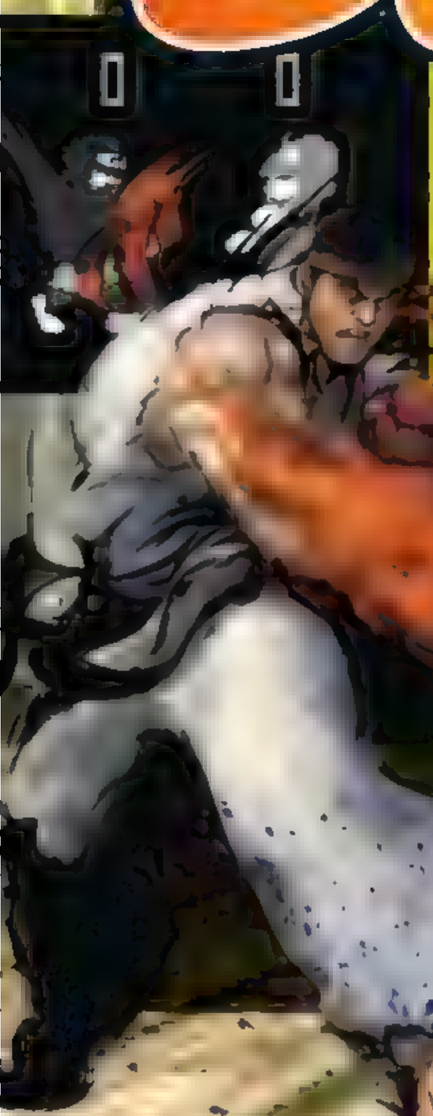
Voicing John Marston — [illegible] performance as John Marston [illegible] showed how far ahead of its time Rockstar is with its storytelling. A very pun-downs were very well written also.

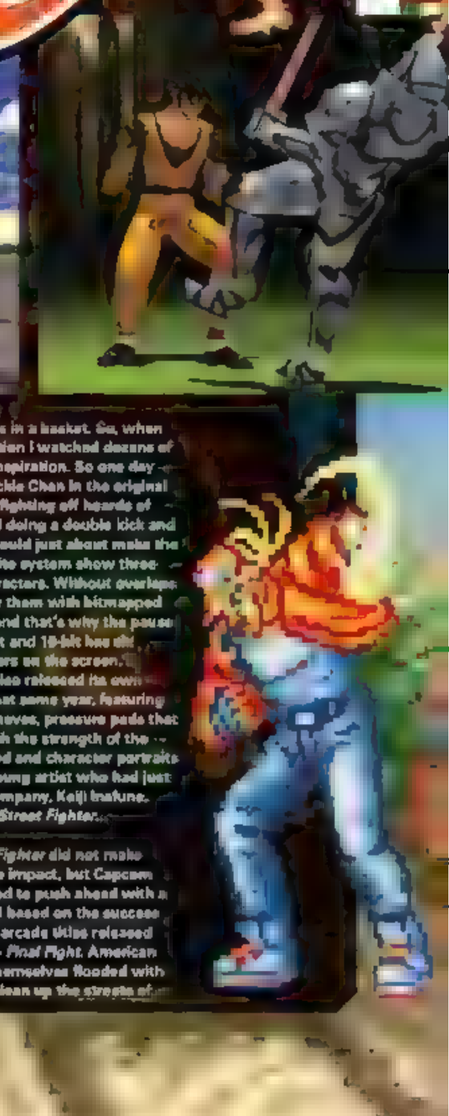
What the press thought



Evolution of Beat-'em-ups

Hadoukens, rising tackles and hellsweeps have become familiar language for almost all gamers. But how did two people hitting each other become one of gaming's most popular genres?





Rye flying off the ground, fist reaching for the sky, Heihachi's grey pants sprouting like wings from the sides of his bald head. Sub-Zero hoisting a spinal cord aloft by the head, blood dripping below. There have been a lot of iconic images in the fighting games genre, the purest form of competition in videogames that pits you against your opponent in an attempt to crush them. But it all started with a humble digital boxing match.

Heavyweight Champ by Sega was the first ever 'fighting' game, a black and white arcade boxing title released in 1976, where the action was controlled by two boxing gloves and players could sway the cabinet itself to move from side to side, dodging incoming punches. Yet despite that promising start, it took a while for the genre to find its feet, but when the first wave of fighting games did finally arrive in the mid-Eighties, they all riffed on the same idea – mimicking karate and kung-fu fighting styles, which were culturally relevant at the time thanks to the sudden popularity of Eastern martial arts films.

Kung-Fu Master saw the player working their way through a tower of goons – and increasingly bizarre enemies, such as contact balls and falling pots while *Karate Champ* recreated one-versus-one competition in a karate dojo. While those titles proved popular in the arcades, Eastern European title *Kung Fu* brought the genre to the home, via the 48k Spectrum.

"While making *Kung Fu* I was learning Assembler, but it was fun and exciting so I cannot count it as a difficulty," recalls Dusko Dimitrijevic, *Kung Fu*'s programmer. "Our main problem was how to put 'graphics' into the computer. That sounds strange now, but then there was no digital cameras, digitisers, scanners or even usable drawing software. At least we had none of those."

Surprisingly, despite the fact that the genre started to make waves in the arcade, Dusko's *Kung Fu* had been created independently of their influence, mostly as arcades in Eastern Europe had difficulty keeping up with the latest titles. "I have seen nothing even close before," Dusko tells us. "When *Kung Fu* was published I heard about a similar arcade game. A friend of mine who just returned from Germany told me about an arcade *Kung Fu* game that even had a similar replay option. At the time we had arcade games here, but, as with everything else, we were few years behind the world, so the best we could find would be like *Pac-Man*."

The popularity of *Karate Champ* began to inspire others, such as 1985's *Way Of The Exploding Fist* and *International Karate*, both of which continued to refine the one-versus-one ideas put forth by *Karate Champ*.

> **"At that time, most of the machines in the arcade were fighting games"**

But it was 1987's *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* that was the biggest step towards the genre we recognise today. It had health bars that would deplete in chunks for each hit and, more importantly, it had a series of opponents with their own unique fighting style. Two of the opponents, Star and Fan, would throw shuriken and fans respectively. This meant that for the first time in the fighting games genre, there was the challenge of getting past a wall of projectiles to land damage on your opponent – something those who have faced Guile or Athena players in later Capcom and SNK games will no doubt be familiar with today.

Fighting games were now arriving thick and fast, and 1987 was a hugely important year for the genre. First was the release of the *International Karate* sequel, *IK+*, which had one-vs-one-vs-one combat. "After playing to death all the other 'karate' and fighting games in general, I wanted to come up with something that none of the others had shown, so they were all getting a bit samey," explains Archer MacLean. "When you see fight scenes in some films set in a Dojo, they often have the other fighters seated around the edge of the fighting area, and I wanted to somehow show fighters getting up to take their turn, while the retiring player goes and sits down or is dragged off for medical attention with his missing limbs in a basket. So, when doing *IK+* animation I watched dozens of films for move-inspiration. So one day I'm watching Jackie Chan in the original *Cannonball Run* fighting off hordes of angry bikers and doing a double kick and I realised that I could just about make the C64's limited sprite system show three overlapping characters. Without overlaps I could just draw them with bitmapped character cells, and that's why the pause mode in *IK+* 8-bit and 16-bit has all dancing characters on the screen."

But Capcom also released its own fighting game that same year, featuring hidden special moves, pressure pads that had to be hit with the strength of the move you wanted and character portraits designed by a young artist who had just started at the company, Keiji Inafune. That game was *Street Fighter*.

Street Fighter did not make a huge impact, but Capcom decided to push ahead with a sequel based on the success of another of its arcade titles released two years later – *Final Fight*. American arcades found themselves flooded with those trying to clean up the streets of

10 Most Influential Games

Metro City with Cody, Guy and Hagger. Although it was a side-scrolling fighter rather than a 'traditional' fighting game, Capcom saw the proof it needed that there was potential in the genre for a monster hit, immediately starting work on a *Street Fighter* sequel.

When *Street Fighter II* was released in 1991, its impact was immediate. It began with an iconic cast of characters who were all selectable, from American hero Guile to Brazilian monster Blanka. Each fighter was a curious mix of national stereotypes and quirky design that has endured to this day, backed by memorable theme tunes such as the workman-like percussion for Zangief and the bellowing elephants on Dhalsim's stage. Each fighter also had their own distinct fighting style and trademark moves, such as Guile's keepaway tactics or Zangief's attempts to close the gap and land a spinning piledriver.

Enhancing the appeal was a bug discovered in testing. The glitch that allowed players to cancel normal attacks into special moves to create combination attacks. This was left in as a hidden feature but would become a staple of the game and eventually the genre itself. Another less known glitch, known as the CPS-1 glitch (as it only worked on the CPS-1 arcade board), allowed players to chain together light attacks by pressing hard punch at the same time as performing the light attacks. These two glitches combined to create a surprisingly deep combo system that gave *Street Fighter II* the depth it needed to ensure it exploded as a competitive game.

Street Fighter II's release marked the start of a golden era for the genre. In the same year that Capcom's sequel hit the arcades, SNK also started to produce fighting games at a dizzying rate. *Fatal Fury* was actually released a few months before *Street Fighter II*, helmed by producer Takashi Nishiyama and planner Hiroshi Matsumoto who defected from Capcom following their work on the original *Street Fighter*. SNK then followed *Fatal Fury* with other series such as *Art Of Fighting*, *Samurai Shodown*, *The King Of Fighters* and *The Last Blade*.

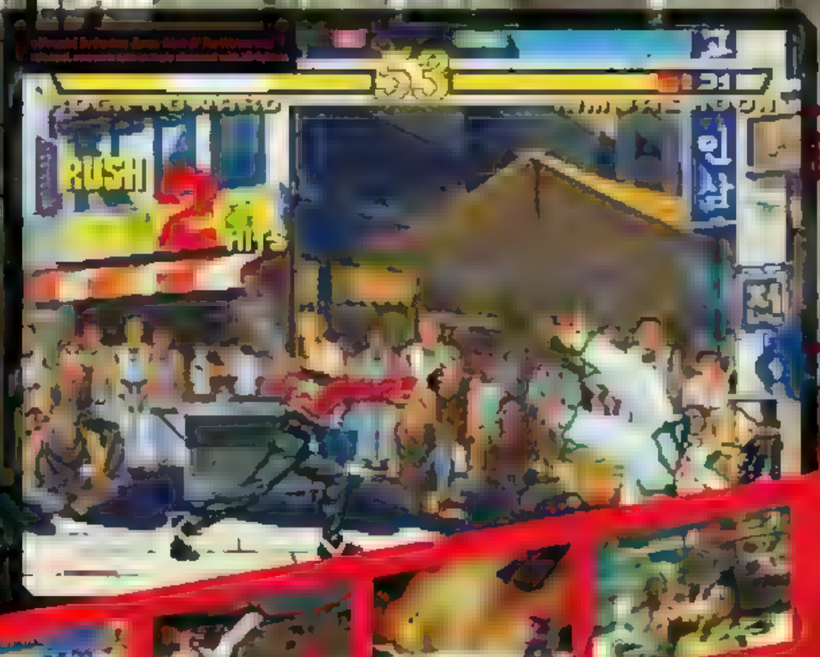
Although they wouldn't prove as popular globally as *Street Fighter II* and its various sequels, SNK's titles found strongholds in Mexico, South America, Pakistan and China, where they usurped Capcom's famous series. It was all thanks to the Neo Geo MVS format. Unlike CPS-1, Neo Geo MVS was cost effective for coin-op operators, who could swap games and artwork for those new titles as they were released. Neo Geo carts were cheaper than typical arcade boards, plus there were plenty of bootlegs in circulation. All this contributed to arcades in poorer countries being able to afford Neo Geo MVS titles, and also charging less per credit, ensuring their popularity.

But advancing technology saw a whole new battle begin within the genre. "At that time, most of the machines in the arcade were fighting games, and there was usually a line waiting to play them," recalls Masaaki Hashino, current producer of the *SoulCalibur* series. "The *Street Fighter* series, as well as other 2D fighters, were the most popular. But players who became interested in the detailed, frame-by-frame strategy involved in 3D fighters started to become drawn to *Virtua Fighter* and *Tekken*."

Street Fighter II might have scored a clean victory over its 2D rivals, but the fight between *Virtua Fighter* and *Tekken* was far massive.

Like *Street Fighter II*, *Virtua Fighter*'s impact in the arcades was immediate. It was the first polygon-based fighting game, which meant it had a whole wealth of new ideas and tricks that hadn't been seen before. Players could triumph by forcing their opponent out of the ring and replays of knockout blows were shown after each win. Fighters had fighting styles vaguely modelled after real martial arts. But most of all, it was the sheer novelty factor of a 3D fighting game that brought *Virtua Fighter* praise and attention. No one had seen anything quite like Sega's fighting game. It was a huge hit.

One company that felt it could tackle *Virtua Fighter* was Namco. Having established arcade racing dominance with *Ridge Racer* in the same year as *Virtua Fighter*'s release, Namco turned its attention to fighting games. Namco and Sony Computer Entertainment had been working together on the SYSTEM11 arcade board, which was based on the same hardware that would be used in Sony's upcoming console, the PlayStation. The first release on the new arcade board was *Tekken* in 1994.



KARATE CHAMP

THE AR KUNG-FU

IK

STREET FIGHTER II

MORTAL KOMBAT

VIRTUA FIGHTER

SUPER STREET FIGHTER II TURBO

TEKKEN 3

SUPER SMASH BROS

STREET FIGHTER IV

Although they were both distinct in that they were 3D fighting games, there were plenty of differences between *Virtua Fighter* and its new rival. *Tekken* had no ring-outs, with the stages endlessly stretching out when fighters moved away from the centre of the stage. The cast was more eccentric that *Virtua Fighter's*, with *Tekken* sporting the likes of Yoshimitsu, King and Kuma. Most importantly, *Virtua Fighter* had a three-button system for punch, kick and guard versus *Tekken's* system of a button for each of the fighter's limbs, something that made the eventual PlayStation port seem like a natural fit for Namco's brawler.

"It was the era of early polygon technology, so we were focusing on development methods for creating 3D humanoid character models and the animation technology necessary to make them move, as we saw this as core technology needed for the next ten years to come," explains *Tekken* director Katsuhiro Harada. "It wanted a logical choice of button assignment to naturally control a character in-game. It was also a good match for the button layout of the PlayStation controller. But the arcade version was developed first, so the arcade button layout and that of the PlayStation controller are different."

Released on Sony's console a year after it hit the arcades, *Tekken* benefitted from weaker competition against the likes of *Battle Arena Toshinden*, becoming one of the flagship series for PlayStation and selling millions. *Virtua Fighter's* platform was Sega Saturn, limiting its exposure and potential audience. The success of their respective consoles proved to be a crucial turning point in the battle for 3D fighting game dominance because, in the arcades, there was a clear winner.

"Honestly, Namco didn't have much experience with fighting games at that time, so not a lot of thought was put into the strategic elements typical of current fighting games," continues Harada. "I'll be honest, *Tekken* was pretty much overlooked in the arcades, and didn't really trend among the arcade players. In Japan, it is usually the case that a fighting game has two machines connected back-to-back. But for unpopular fighting games, sometimes it is just on one machine alone, as the lack of popularity hardly merits using two arcade machines and the space they require. *Tekken* was exactly like that, and most often was on a sole machine with no one playing. There was one arcade in Shinjuku where it was popular, but that community was probably the only one in Japan at that time. At that time, *Virtua Fighter* was quite popular in Japan and had a decent following. Honestly, I was jealous, and it was an object I looked at with both fear and respect."

Virtua Fighter's dominance drove Harada to do anything necessary to help *Tekken* gain more exposure in Japanese arcades. "I assembled a character costume with the company's money, and organised tournaments and helped hype the game while cosplaying as that character," Harada tells us. "*Tekken* was an unknown that I had to resort to those drastic measures to gain attention for the game."

> "I wanted to come up with something that none of the others had shown"
> Katsuhiro Harada

But just as 2D fighting games were struggling for some semblance of balance – *Street Fighter II: Championship Edition* had a ridiculously overpowered M Bison while 'SNK boss syndrome' meant that those playing either *Fatal Fury* or *The King Of Fighters* on their own didn't escape at all lightly either – 3D fighting games also found balance to be a fairly elusive element at times.

"One interesting episode is that *Tekken*, as a competitive fighting game, was so unbalanced that rather than guarding King's elbow attack it was common consensus to crouch and eat it on purpose, rather than guard," continues Harada. "The same with Nina's Kneel Kick. Players would move forward instead of guard because, for some reason, you could counterattack Nina if you did so. When you hear this now it sounds crazy but, at the time, it was common knowledge to everyone. Most fighting game players try hard to guard everything, but expert *Tekken* players would let a move hit them on purpose. I still remember to this day the perplexed look on the faces of *Virtua Fighter* and *Street Fighter* players when seeing this."

With the success of *Tekken* on PlayStation giving Namco a new sense of confidence, it quickly moved onto a new 3D fighting game series to accompany *Tekken* – the weapons-based brawler *SoulEdge*. Despite the immense competition in the fighting game genre, Hoshino says that the team didn't feel intimidated by joining the increasingly competitive genre.

"Our goal was to create a weapon-based fighting game that made more use of the 3D playing field for its fighting mechanics, and featured high-end graphics with more improved lighting," he explains. "As such, there was more a feeling of excitement about trying on accomplishing this, rather than a feeling of pressure. Also, we put quite a bit of effort into the story setting and character development to attract more female gamers, and others who wouldn't normally try out a fighting game."

Hoshino says his personal highlight was watching footage of *SoulEdge* as the Namco fighter made its first public bow at Japan's Amusement Machine Show in 1995: "A game designer, still a new recruit, used the linked assets available at that time to create [the video footage]. He used the controller to carefully and precisely control the camera for cinematic flare, and then put a lot of care into editing to surprising effect. We were all very happy that many people were looking forward to the game after seeing the footage, and the motivation of everyone on the team greatly increased. A lot of ideas began to come to us at that time as well. This perhaps led to our pursuit of a high level of graphic quality and features that, as a result, saw the implementation of the well-received interactive ending sequences, and the editable opening sequence in the Dreamcast version."

SoulCalibur found a new home outside of the arcade on Dreamcast, as 3D fighting games continued to soar on console with the *Tekken* and *Virtua Fighter* series joined by new upstart *Dead Or Alive*. But eventually, and perhaps inevitably, the power of the fighting game began to wane. As *Street Fighter* grew increasingly complex with its combo system (*Alpha* series) and defensive options (*Street Fighter III*), only hardcore fans stuck around. Financial troubles saw SNK collapse, later reborn as SNK Playmore. Even 3D fighting game series had their momentum slowed with mediocre entries – *Virtua Fighter 3*, *Tekken 4* and *Soul Calibur III* all disappointed fans.

The biggest factor in the genre was how the status of fighting games in arcades was changing. In an attempt to draw crowds from consoles, arcades began to turn away from fighting games and towards unique arcade cabinets that would provide experiences you simply couldn't get at home. The growth of competitive play thanks to tournaments like EVO and Super Battle Opera helped fighting games stay relevant during a lean period but, ultimately, muscled out of arcades and without decent online play, fighting games found themselves in limbo. Xbox Live was the first step on the road to recovery with online play for *Capcom Vs SNK 2: EO* and *Street Fighter Anniversary Collection*, but it would take the invention and evolution of GGPO technology to provide the first real alternative to arcade play.

As we all know, *Street Fighter IV* would bring the genre back with a vengeance in 2008, and we now have fighting games spanning crossover titles (*Street Fighter X Tekken*), new IP (*Skullgirls*), HD re-releases (*Darkstalkers Resurrection*), free-to-play (*Tekken Revolution*) amongst familiar faces such as *Tekken*, *SoulCalibur*, *Dead Or Alive* and *The King Of Fighters*. Progress has come at a cost. Almost all of the top fighting game arcades outside of Japan have closed their doors, such as New York's Chinatown Fair (2011), London's Trocadero (2011) and LA's Family Fun Arcade (2012). The cost of 2D animation has seen Capcom now default to a less interesting '2.5D' style of visuals, with only *ArcSys* and *The King Of Fighters* flying the flag for hand-drawn animation.

But some things never change. The cry of "Shoryuken!" as Ryu flies into the air is still common. Heihachi's hair still makes no sense. Sub-Zero is still fond of solving disagreements by reaching for spinal cords. Hopefully, the rebirth of the fighting game genre means that we'll see a whole host of new iconic images in the years to come.

Yoshinori Ono, Street Fighter's producer, looks back at its past and successful revival

We've heard that you played a lot of *Final Fight* in the arcades when you were younger. What do you remember most about the arcade scene in Japan when *Street Fighter II* was released?

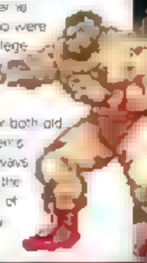
At that time, competing in games meant racing games or high score games, so *Street Fighter* really brought a physical element into the virtual world. The characters, graphics and especially the tools that the game made available to players had never been seen in an arcade game up until then, and it all exploded in popularity with *Street Fighter II*. The virtual battles in-game even lead to numerous fights in real life (laugh). That is how passionately and seriously the players took those tools of competition and remembered it all vividly. Players who won could keep on playing without paying any more money, but those who lost had those ten seconds that the timer was counting down to either put in more money and continue or give up altogether. The mixed feelings of humiliation from losing but also the financial implications of putting in more money to rematch was a big hit to the players' hearts and wallets.

What do you think it is that made *Street Fighter II* so special compared to other fighting games?

I believe it is because each of the characters are so unique. The combination of their personalities, moves and background stories all work together to create a fantastic universe. Characters such as Balrog and Dhalsim don't exist in real life but they were created with human elements in mind. In this way the emotions that were put into each character resonate with people and their memories of the game. Also, it was the first game that really provided the broad set of tools for players to use to compete with each other. *Street Fighter IV* continued the legacy of the DNA that came from *Street Fighter II*.

What was it that made Capcom decide to bring *Street Fighter* back with *Street Fighter IV*?

I personally loved this series and started working on it since *Street Fighter 3rd Strike*. One of the reasons I joined Capcom 20 years ago was because I wanted to create *Street Fighter* games. Before *SFIV* was released, out of the 2,000 Capcom employees no one wanted a new *Street Fighter* game except for the 50 people on the development team (laughs). Since the situation was so stacked against us, we wanted to make the revival happen even more (laughs). And the continued support of the media and fans who keep asking for a new SF game greatly contributed to the revitalisation of the series.

** 
Street Fighter IV has been the most popular fighting game this generation and revived the genre. Why do you think it was so popular?**

I believe it is because the original SF and *SFII* created the foundation for fighting games that *SFIV* became so popular. The concept behind the creation of *SFIV* was a return to the beginning. The college students who spent hours on their SNES playing the home console version of SF are all farmers now, and we wanted to let them experience that same nostalgic feeling. Also, the people who were kids when *SFII* came out are now college students. We wanted to provide a new gameplay experience for them as well. The intent was to create a product that brought together both old and new. When you look at tournaments and even this year's EVO you can always see new talent rising up to challenge the old guard. Because we have this kind of history with the series, I believe many people can enjoy the games.

Hall of Brawlers

THE COOLEST FIGHTERS FROM THE PAST 30 YEARS

RYU

Ryu has served as the iconic character for fighting games as a whole, let alone *Street Fighter*, while 'Hadouken' and 'Shoryuken' have become iconic terms. The Japanese for hurricane kick? Not so much.

TERRY

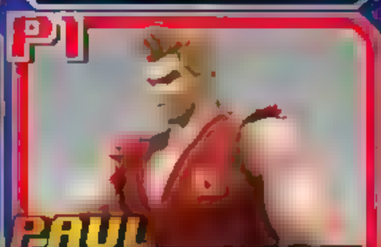
SNK's first 'lead character' in fighting games, Terry Bogard is defined by his sleeveless red top, red *Fatal Fury* cap and lines like "Are you okay? Buzzsaw Wolf!"

HAOHMARU

The most relatable character in *Samurai Shodown*'s cast of eccentric fighters, Haohmaru has brought his samurai sword to the likes of *Capcom Vs SNK 2*, *SNK Vs Capcom* and *Neo Geo Battle Coliseum*.

FALCON

Just about every character in *Super Smash Bros* is recognisable thanks to Nintendo's heritage, but the top-tier terror who dominated Melee tournaments and has come to represent the series is Falcon.



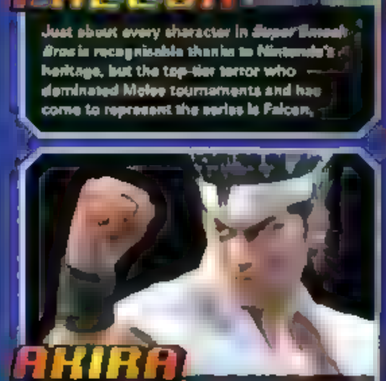
P1

PAUL

Although many *Tekken* characters have stood the test of time, Paul's hairdo and easy-to-learn playing style (endless Deathfists for some players) meant he stood out from the Mishimas as a fan favourite.

KARATE CHAMP

The simple karate practitioner was one of the first fighting game characters and his design has endured through the lines of SNK's Kim, Takuma and Mr Karate.

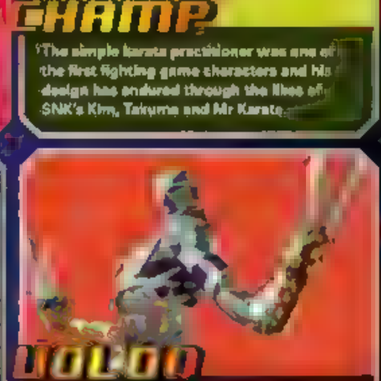


AKIRA

He looks like a bland karate dojo-style brawler but his fighting style, a series of fast, powerful blows with extremely complex execution (at least up until *VF5*), meant he was an expert-only character.

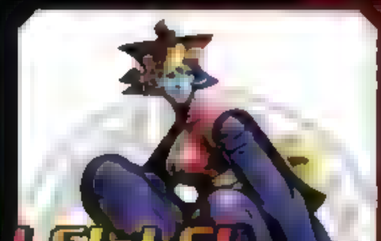
SCORPION

Mortal Kombat's ninjas, Scorpion and Sub-Zero, were the hottest (or coolest) characters since the beginning. It was *Scorpion*'s 'get over here!' spear move that became a series trademark though.



VOLDO

SoulCalibur's characters tend to share equal billing but Voldo is the one image that will burn in your eyes long after playing, thanks to his odd mental stance and fetish for bondage gear.



LEI-LEI

Felicia, Demitri and B.B Hood are equally well known, but Lei-Lei is a more unusual example of a popular character as she's so unorthodox and difficult to use effectively.

HIBIKI

The most well known of the *Last Blade* crew, thanks to an appearance in *Capcom Vs SNK 2* where she emerged as one of the stronger characters and certainly one of the most unique.

BONNE JENET

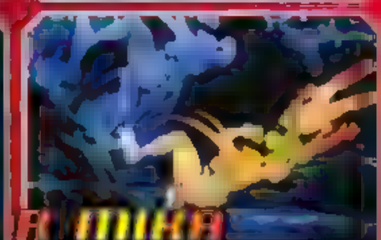
SNK's English pirate girl first emerged in *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* and has been a fan favourite since. Her unusual fighting style, relying on tricky air moves, means that she's fairly unique in the genre too.

SOL BADGUY

Guilty Gear's answer to Ryu popularised the term 'dustloop', a combo that sees Sol looping the same corner combo that involves the Dust button.

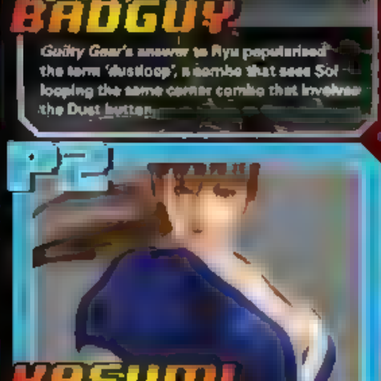
Q

Street Fighter III brought in a wealth of new faces, but it was *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*'s Q who really captured everyone's imagination because no-one really knew who he was. Man? Robot? Both?



RAMIKA

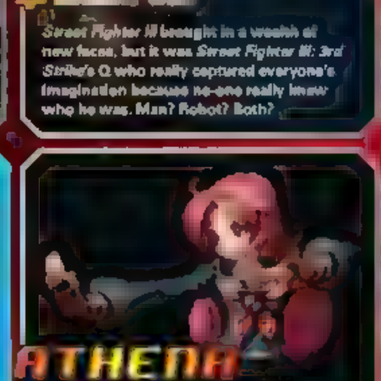
Alpha's most requested character who hasn't been brought back in *Street Fighter IV*, R Mika had an unusual fighting style (where she was a grappler with a series of throws that had delays on them).



P2

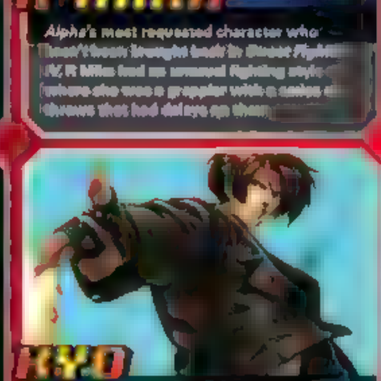
KASUMI

Clearly the face of *Dead Or Alive*, Kasumi has been a series mainstay and the first character to appear on all promotional material such as trailers and artwork.



ATHENA

She started in 1986's *Psycho Soldier* but eventually crossed over to the *King Of Fighters* series, where she became one of the most popular and recognisable faces in the franchise.



KYO

Whether it's Kyo or Iori, take your pick for a *King Of Fighters* lead character. These two serve as the Ryu and Ken of the series, or perhaps the Ryu and Akuma – Kyo being the 'hero' and Iori the evil, damaged character.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past

PLATFORM: SNES DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RELEASED: 1992

When Link is first cast into the Dark World, it's all a bit surreal.

Transformed into a pink bunny and left with just a blob and a friendly friend for company – seems like a quick one-off side piece and nothing more, but then what happens when Agahnim drags Link into the Dark World for a second time? This is a set piece. This is what they offered more. Although based on the same map, the two worlds are widely different in terms of layout and population – new dungeons appear, previously inaccessible locations unfold, under-touted items are armed. Success would rely upon clever use of portals and the Magic Mirror, a quirky item that bears the two planes of existence and although this technique has been copied in countless games ever since, it can all be traced back to Link's original mind-blowing, dimension-mapping antics.

BIO

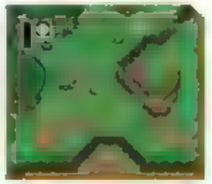
Oh, it's just one of the greatest games of all time, that's all. Returning to the format of the original game rather than its divisive sequel, Nintendo created an open world that was endlessly enjoyable to explore and one that rewarded curiosity and persistence wonderfully. Even today, after so many sequels, *A Link To The Past* holds up as perhaps the definitive Zelda experience – modern interpretations have tended to be more formulaic and gimmick-heavy, so this freeform adventure (where success doesn't always hinge on the last tool you found) is rightly regarded as a timeless classic.

MORE CLASSIC A LINK TO THE PAST MOMENTS

Gotta Catch 'Em All

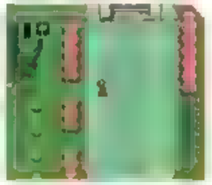
Bees are useful enough when you can lob them for a quick energy refill, but that moment when you realise that you can carry the buggers around with you is one that you'll never forget. Its cousin, the guy who gives you the bug net, isn't exactly subtle about its uses but, even so, swiping a fairy out of the air and storing it in a jar for later was an incredible sensation. And the surprise of being revived by one was even better.

A Kind Of Magic



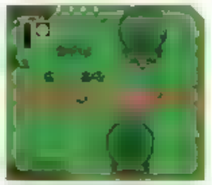
Early in the game, it doesn't look like the magic gauge is going to be very important. Sure, it lets you set fire to stuff and light up dark areas, so that's handy, what anyone other than Gwenivere would call magic. Explore the further reaches of Hyrule and you'll find numerous ways to put that meter to far more impressive use, from the handy ice Rod to the secret medallions that grant Link unique abilities.

A Link To The Past



Top-down games of the time had a tendency to be slower and more considered than side-scrolling efforts. Which is exactly how, with his basic gear, the introduction of the Pegasus Boots can turn into a bit of a greed-up thing, but – meaning you must race through certain areas and overcome any obstacles in your path. But we'll never forget how big it felt as to realise the changing mechanics could shake terms free. The bloody buck.

Obey Your Master

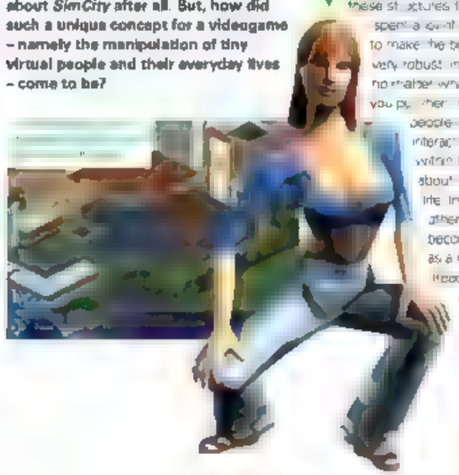


It's a Master Sword, its Master Sword then in Zelda games, but the speed at which you can get your hands on it here is amazing. Three or one jaunts, three easy bosses, one easy boss and that genuinely worrying thing is, three individuals are all that stand between you and the mighty weapon, which gives you a ranged attack while at full health and allows him to take on Agahnim to finally reach the Dark World.

Even now, The Sims remains the second best-selling PC game of all time – beaten only by its sequel, The Sims 2 – solidifying its position as one of the games industry's most influential titles. Adam Barnes speaks to its creator Will Wright about how these digital people were born

It's surprising to consider that *The Sims* – the best-selling PC franchise of all time – nearly wasn't made. Its creator, Will Wright, had a battle on his hands as he tried to develop the idea, and no one at Maxis shared that vision. It was, in Wright's own words, "a struggle". But, it was something *he* wanted to play, and he knew that others must feel the same; they did about *SimCity* after all. But, how did such a unique concept for a videogame – namely the manipulation of tiny virtual people and their everyday lives – come to be?

"I was always interested in architecture and architectural design," Will Wright explains, "and after SimCity, I started thinking that I wanted to do something that was more around designing structures. So originally, it was more meant to be an architectural version of SimCity. As we went down that path, I started thinking I needed some way to score what it was that you were building, and so I knew I needed little people living in these structures that you were designing. I spent a long time thinking about how to make the behaviour of these people very robust, interesting and plausible no matter what kind of environment you put them in. Creating these tiny people – AI characters that would interact with the structures but within the simulation – took about two years of Will's life. In between a variety of other projects, SimCity had become a huge success and as a result, Maxis had a little freedom to create ideas that it wanted to see made. For Will Wright, that would end up being *The Sims*.



> **"I always thought of it kind of as a human flocking simulator"**
> Will Wright

It turned out that controlling the little people was actually more interesting," recalls Will. "It was still fun designing houses for them, but controlling them was actually turned out to be far more compelling. So the whole project took a turn towards the people – kept the architecture tools in, here, but then just really started focusing more on the people and objects and their behaviours and relationships all that sort of stuff."

But Maxis wasn't convinced. Though Will detailed the project and what he hoped would be, the company was nonplussed. Why play a game about emulating real-life when videogames could help us live out our wildest fantasies? "When I was describing it to them [Maxis], even with the focus on the people – they were hearing a game about taking out the trash and cleaning out your bathroom and it just doesn't sound very interesting in them compared to saving the world or flying a fighter," Will persisted, however, knowing what sort of thing he needed to make. "But I kind of understood that people are fascinated with people," he says, "and I knew it was interesting to me and I kind of had to fight for it internally. At first, nobody was behind the project. We had some programmers who were in a tool group that we weren't using really so I turned it into a Black Ops project on my side and said, 'Can I have these four programmers' – and nobody really cared so they said, 'Yeah.'"

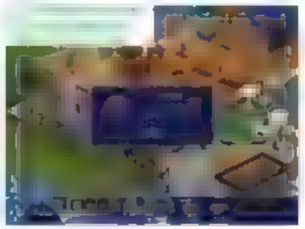
It wasn't just his fellow developers that he had to convince either, with the game concept that would turn out to be one of the most important PC games of all time's struggling to even appeal to focus testers in the earliest stages of development. "We even did a focus group back in, I think, '93," states Will, "where we were focus testing about five different game concepts. I remember, I will, the other four the focus testers said, 'Oh yeah, it was pretty good, we would play that,' but when I came to The Sims and we were describing the idea to them, they were all universally like, 'Oh that's such a stupid idea, we would never play that,' we hate that idea.' It totally bombed in the focus group."

Will always believed in the concept, however, and with his secret team of programmers he set about creating an early part of the simulator. He admits it was "kind of crude and it looked kind of something like The Sims when you can't play it and you can't see it," adding that it's always difficult to really sell any idea lodged in the back of a designer's mind. "It was hard for others to really get what the Sims was going to be. I'm very much had this concept of what it would feel like, but to expect somebody else to understand and have that concept, it's a hard thing. And I've been in the same position before, where somebody told me the same idea they had and I just didn't get it and it sounded kind of stupid. I know the guys who made *Myst* and they were showing me one of the early versions and I was like, 'What's this? It's just a slideshow,' but once I saw the final version I played it and loved it. But when they were describing it to me in the very early stages, I just couldn't wrap my mind around it."

As development went on, it was clear that Will needed to flesh out these ideas and the key way to highlight what it was is about was through these virtual characters. The Sims themselves were caricatures of real-life representatives of what we might look like to an almighty being capable of a higher level of thought. Quaint, simple perhaps – but entertaining all the same. While part of this was down to the limited resources available at the time, there was also a conscious decision to keep the Sims sub-real, to create a real impression of people but to ensure that it was enjoyable at the same. "We understood

IN THE KNOW

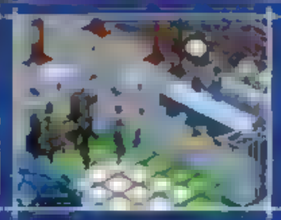
PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEVELOPER: MAXIS
RELEASED: 2000
PLATFORM: VARIOUS
GENRE: LIFE SIM



EXPANDING THE SIMS

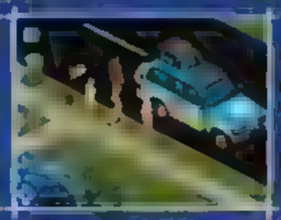
The Sims' success steamrolled and, inevitably, expansion packs were released. At the time, The Sims was the game with the most expansion packs ever, surpassed only by later versions of the game.

LIVIN' IT UP
AUGUST 2000



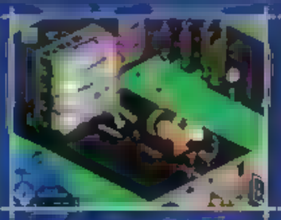
HOUSE PARTY
APRIL 2001

HOT DATE
NOVEMBER 2001



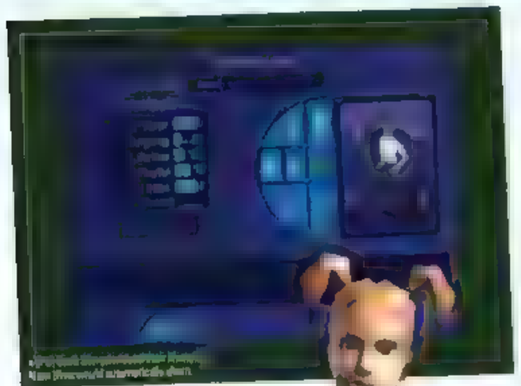
VACATION
MARCH 2002

UNLEASHED
NOVEMBER 2002



SUPERSTAR
MAY 2003

MAKIN' MAGIC
OCTOBER 2003



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

RAID ON [illegible]LING BAY
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1985

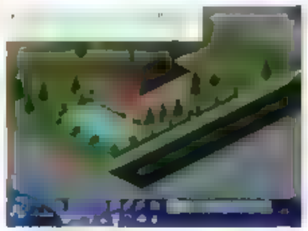
SIMCITY
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1989

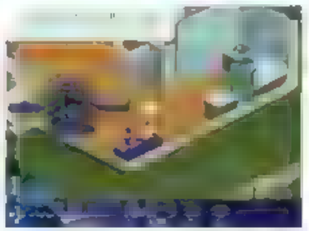
SPORE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 2008

▶ that at some point we wanted a certain level of abstraction." Will tells us. "Part of that had to do with the amount of detail that we were able to put into the simulation. I always thought of it kind of as a human-looking simulation. The level of behaviour that I figured we could achieve was like if you were to look out of a balcony window and see people down on the street you could probably get a sense of when they're shopping, when they're arguing or some level of understanding their behaviour but not necessarily every little detail. And that was the target for me: to try and simulate these characters at that level."

Even similar thoughts about language that your virtual characters spoke in-game, was purposely chosen to enable the player's imagination to represent the idea of real-life and not to mimic it. One of the key decisions was the fact that they wouldn't actually be speaking English – that we would actually have their speak their own language. This is one of those situations where the computer is pretty good at simulating certain things and really bad at simulating other things. We could have had them speaking pre-recorded lines or something like that, but it would have destroyed the illusion of reality pretty quickly, so because we couldn't make it perfect, we left it out. By having them speak this kind of gibberish, your human imagination actually fills in the blanks and will imagine the conversation. That's really an example of us offloading a portion of the simulation to the human imagination – the portion that the computer's very bad at."

But how did Will go about creating a whole new language and a tests focused on more exotic languages as Will tried to hone in on the sound of The Sims? "We actually had some Ukrainian programmers working for us and I had recording some of them speaking Ukrainian and it was a little too obviously slavic and then I started experimenting with different languages. Navajo was nice but we couldn't find any Navajo voice actors. Estonian was very interesting because Estonian is very hard to locate. It sounds interesting, exotic and like a real language but you can't really associate with any geographical area – but we only found one Estonian voice actor. And eventually I found these wonderful voice actors. They came in and we described to them that we wanted

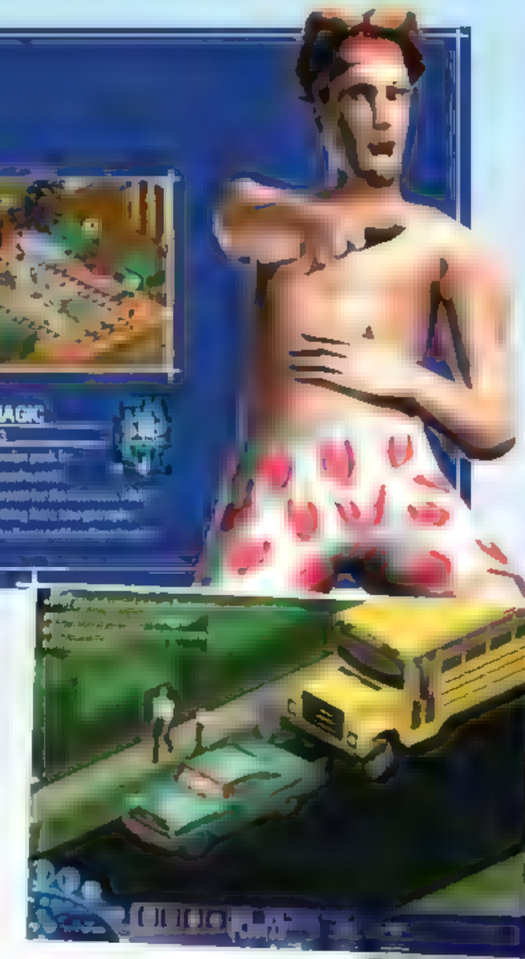


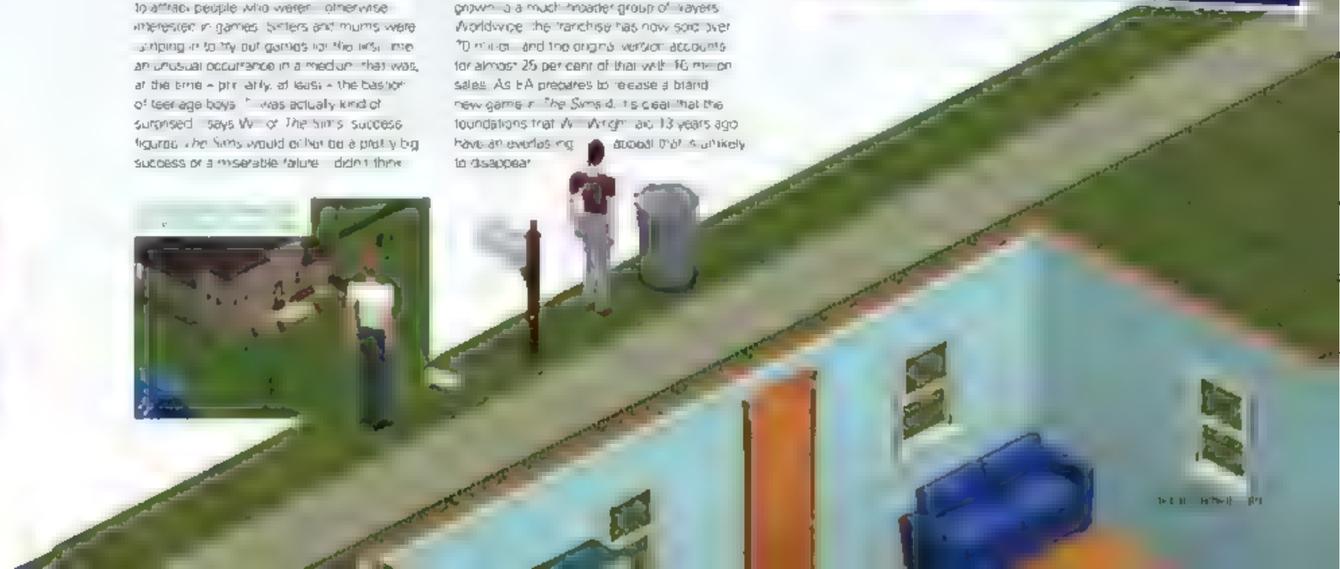


> **"I spent a lot of time thinking about how to make the behaviour of these people very robust, interesting and plausible"**
> Will Wright

something that sounded like a real language but not really. Together they kind of developed what later became known as 'Simlish'."

Most would recognise a conversation in Simlish if they heard it – and a large part of that is its comic – and unique – approach to language. As it turns out, the Sims was a pretty big success, most notable for its ability to attract people who were otherwise uninterested in games. Sisters and mums were jumping in to try out games for the first time, an unusual occurrance in a medium that was, at the time – primarily, at least – the basion of teenage boys. "It was actually kind of surprised," says Will of The Sims' success figures. "The Sims would either be a pretty big success or a miserable failure. I didn't think there was going to be a lot of in-between. Really, the key to it was getting players into the right mindspace of seeing this game as something that was more creative and about enjoying and a little less about winning." The Sims was released in February 2000, and two years later it had notched up over 15 million sales. The reach of videogames had officially grown to a much broader group of players. Worldwide, the franchise has now sold over 70 million, and the original version accounts for almost 25 per cent of that with 16 million sales. As EA prepares to release a brand new game in The Sims, it's clear that the foundations that Will Wright laid 13 years ago have an everlasting appeal that is unlikely to disappear.





THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home

SPATTER

Developer: Sega **Year:** 1984 **Genre:** Maze game

Spatter's Japanese title roughly translates as 'Sanrin Sanchan – Mr Tricycle', and while it's obvious why Sega thought a name change might help the game's overseas fortunes, it's less clear why the publisher settled on the name it did. It is possible Sega intended to call it *Splatter* – its gameplay certainly involves squashing and being squashed – but got landed with *Spatter* after consulting a Japanese to English dictionary. What is apparent, though, is *Spatter*'s high quality and uniquely Sega vibe. On first inspection it appears to be a straightforward maze-based collect-'em-up, but the clever mechanics underpinning the deceptively simple layouts of *Spatter*'s bright stages produce a far more interesting challenge.

As you might have guessed from the game's Japanese title, the player takes charge of a tricycle manned by the orange hooded Sanrin Sanchan, with your objective being to collect flowers that grow within a series of garden mazes. Naturally, this upsets the various gardeners whose hard toil you're making a mockery of and they soon try to stop your floral thievery by chasing you down using go-karts, helicopters and steamrollers. So far, as *Pac-Man*.

But, as mentioned, *Spatter* has fresh mechanics up its sleeves, specifically the imaginative defence mechanisms you're given to play with.

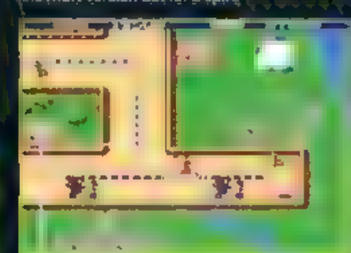
First up, you can ram into the side of the fences you cycle past, which would be pointless if not for the fact that they're elastic. Fences offer two possibilities: you can bend into them while a go-karting opponent on the other side is opposite you, which knocks them out of the maze, or you can leapfrog any foe on your side of the fence by riding into it and over them. Your second defence – breezeblocks that litter the maze – are optional in early rounds, but essential in later ones, as fences don't damage helicopter-piloting adversaries. Still, later levels feature indestructible steamrollers, but a carefully lobbed breezeblock can see off weaker enemies or block their progress.

Spatter also offers bonus rounds between stages where you pick fruit and deliver the flowers you've collected to Sanrin's girlfriend. On reaching her, you hold hands and bow, another of *Spatter*'s many idiosyncrasies. These might explain why it's unconverted, but don't make it any less worthy of a rediscovery.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

RALLY-X 1981

Rally-X involves a vehicle-based maze chase and clearing its stages requires collecting all the items in the maze, so it's a pretty decent alternative to *Spatter*. Take the MSX version out for a spin.



Imaginative mechanics distinguish *Spatter* as more than a simple maze game. Flexible fences offer players creative ways of avoiding or shunting enemy vehicles.

Quirky opponents are a Sega staple, and *Spatter* is no exception. The foes you first encounter ride go-karts and [illegible]

People hating about videogame violence should be shown Sanrin Sanchan innocently collecting flowers on his trusty tricycle. Don't mention the breezeblocks, though.

Spatter's look and feel can only be described as Sega-esque. Its vivid colour scheme, polished sprites and playful atmosphere are straight out of the Fantasy Zone.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

PIG NEWTON

Developer: Sega **Year:** 1983 **Genre:** Platformer

Pig Newton was developed for Sega's G80 coin-op system, an interesting setup with raster and vector versions that allowed arcade operators to change the game in a compatible cabinet by swapping one CPU board for another. In truth, the games produced for the vector variant are more fondly remembered than their sprite-based counterparts. This is a little unfair, as some G80 raster titles are decent games. *Pig Newton*, however, is a missed opportunity: its gameplay and graphics are sound, but its unresponsive controls make navigating the main character an act of sheer masochism.

The aim is to collect bird eggs while dropping apples onto the heads of two hungry wolves trying to chop down the tree you're hiding in, but time after time the game's control set is left wanting. One cheap death after cheap death as you attempt to compensate for the eponymous Pig Newton's delayed and unpredictable reactions, followed by a chip tune 'Wah, Wah, Wah!' that rubs salt in the wound. It's a shame really, as with tighter controls the game could have been a lot of fun. As it stands, though, there would have been little demand for a home version.

UFO SENSHI YOHKO CHAN

Developer: Sega / Vic Tokai **Year:** 1986 **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up

Vic Tokai is perhaps better known for developing *Psycho Fox* and *Decap Attack* for the console market, but it also developed a handful of arcade titles, the majority of which were published by Sega.

UFO Senshi Yohko Chan, or 'Extraterrestrial Soldier Yohko Chan' in English, is probably the best coin-op effort Vic Tokai produced and is by far the most original in terms of gameplay. The best way to explain the game is by saying it genres-hops. For instance, the opening stage takes place in a top-down maze where blasting invading extraterrestrials is rewarded with coins that allow you to buy upgrades in a shop. Aside from extra lives and time, more powerful firearms are on sale, with newly purchased weapons becoming selectable alternatives rather than replacements for your trusty laser pistol. Conversely, some later levels are side-scrolling platformers where dexterity and timing play as big a part in your survival as firepower. The reason the game remains unconverted, however, has probably as much to do with its uniquely Japanese flavour as its unusual blend of genres.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

ALIEN SYNDROME 1987

Admittedly, it's tough to find an equivalent of *UFO Senshi Yoyko-Chan* that was converted to home systems so, instead, get yourself Sega's widely ported maze-shooter *Alien Syndrome* and scrolling platformer *Wonder Boy* and then play one after the other.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

MERCS 1990

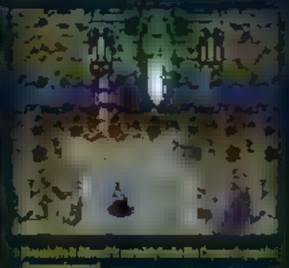
MERCS should clearly be your first port of call when seeking out a home-based alternative to *Desert Breaker*. As well as the Mega Drive version, *MERCS* was also ported to various home computers. Play the Mega Drive outing though, as it's absolutely fantastic fun.

DESERT BREAKER

Developer: Sega **Year:** 1992 **Genre:** Run-and-gun

One glance at *Desert Breaker* tells you that it's Sega's take on Capcom's top-down shooter *MERCS*. In fact, the similarities between the two games may go some way to explaining the rarity of the *Desert Breaker* coin-op. Sega's title certainly resembles *MERCS* enough to have made their lawyers nervous, and legal concerns likely influenced Sega's decision to license and port *MERCS* to the Mega Drive rather than converting *Desert Breaker*.

Inspiration and unconverted status aside, Sega's homage delivers on gameplay and does so while tweaking the tried and tested *MERCS* formula. One obvious change is that you can flee from overwhelming firefights by hitting a dash button, which grants a temporary speed boost and invulnerability. And as well as being able to upgrade your firearms to more destructive variants, you can also exchange your grenades for special weapons. More importantly, though, the game's countless enemies and imposing bosses provide a stiff and varied challenge, which is everything you want from a no-nonsense run-and-gun title.



In the chair with...

COLIN PORCH

Colin Porch saw it all go wrong at Imagine Software and helped it go very right at Ocean. He tells Paul Drury about dungeons, dragons, vengeful wives and why he's still head over heels in love with making games

The archetypal games coder of the early Eighties may have been a scruffy teenager tapping away in his bedroom while his mum made his tea, but Colin Porch was into his thirties when he discovered the joys of videogames. He swapped a career in finance for creating games at some of Britain's best-known software houses. He was there when it all went pear-shaped at Imagine Software and then hopped across Liverpool to spend several years at Software Projects. His longest and most fruitful stint in the industry was with Ocean in Manchester, where he worked on such successful arcade conversions as *Gryzor* and *Operation Wolf* and brought the wonderful *Head Over Heels* to the C64, Atari ST and Amiga. Colin welcomed us into his Northamptonshire home, which has a trusty ST upstairs, but sadly no porch.

Would it be fair to say that you came to games programming later in life?
Well, at Ocean they used to call me Fossil, or Grandad.

How rude.
I didn't mind. I mean, I was twice as old as most of them. I was 35 when I first used a computer. It was in the late Seventies and I bought a Radofin console, which was cheaper than an Atari. It had *Pong* and *Connect 4* on and games like that and, after a while they released a 'Hobby Module'. The advertising just said, 'buy this, you can make your own games!' It sounded wonderful. I ordered one even though it was £85, which was a hefty amount in 1980.

What was it that convinced you to take the plunge?
I played the games on the console and just thought I could do better! It was a tiny little cartridge and had a DIN socket on the back where you could plug a tape recorder in. I found out very quickly I'd need to learn machine code to program it. It didn't even have an assembler. You had to work out the hex code and type in B6, A9 and so on.

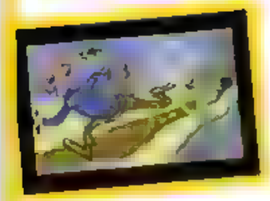
It came with a keyboard then?
(laughs) No, you had to join the two joystick controllers together and use the buttons on them!

That sounds like hard work, Colin.
What was even worse was the instruction book it came with was full of errors. It had clearly been written in English by people who didn't speak English. I could've written a better one myself after a few months. But the processor was a Signetics 2650, and it's one of the best processors I've ever used – much better architecture than the 6502 I'd end up using on the Commodore 64!

Did you manage to write any games for the Radofin?
Yes, a few. The best one was *California Gold Rush* (which was the Pac-Man reverse – put those rectangles on screen and each contained a certain amount of cash. If you can complete a trail all the way round, you get the dosh, but these Indians are also patrolling the maze and if they come across your trail, they wipe it out and on later levels they can fire at you. There were sprites and sound effects – all squeezed into 4K of memory!

It sounds to us like quite a playable little game.
I did write to Radofin saying I'd made this game but never got a reply. Then I saw an ad in our local paper from a company called Anik wanting computer games. It was run by a guy called Richard Andrews in Northampton which wasn't too far from me in Kettering, so I rang him up and said I hadn't got a commercial product – only a handful of people must have had the Radofin and the hobby module – but I was pretty confident I could convert it to another machine. He came over and saw it and told me Commodore was very accommodating to programmers wanting to make games for their machines but Atari wasn't helpful at all. So, for my birthday, my dad bought me a Commodore 64 not an Atari 800!

So you converted the game to the C64 and Anik distributed it?
That was the idea! Mr Andrews took a



CM: Pain's C64 debutante *California Gold Rush*, though he certainly didn't strike it rich

It has to never be off to return to bedroom coding

It was Colin's team was working on *Dragon's Lair II* when he left Software Projects for Oceans new

copy of the finished game and asked me if he could borrow my colour printer, which were like gold dust in the early Eighties, to start producing advertising materials. I said okay and that was the last time I ever saw him. I tried to ring him and write to him and even went to his house in Northampton but found it empty.

It sounds like you were gazumped like the gold prospectors of old, didn't that put you off the software industry a bit?

I saw it as a local rip-off. This would be 1983 and I'd just seen an advert for Imagine Software in Liverpool who actually wanted to employ people. I went up to see them and showed Dave Lawson (joint founder of Imagine Software) *California Gold Rush*. He was quite impressed and he asked me if I'd taught myself. I said, 'We've all taught ourselves haven't we?' He laughed and said 'When can you start?'

Colin built upon Harvey Smith Showjumper for the Commodore 64. His new game, Jetset, sold

Jetset (Software Projects) received rave reviews, winning awards and critical praise

What project did Imagine assign you to?

Dave mentioned this 'universal programme'. The idea was it would be a framework you could put any game into. It'd have a beginning, a central hub where all the items in the game would be processed and a loop to handle things as they change in the game.

It sounds like a very early example of a 'development tool'

Effectively that's what it was, and I did get it working. My understanding was that they'd taken on loads of staff because they had the deal with Marshall Cavendish to produce a game a month to be given away with a magazine they were publishing.

Of course! That's why they needed a tool to help produce games as quickly as possible.

Even with the tool, I don't think it was ever feasible. Simplistically, you might say if it takes one person six months to make a game, six people should take one month, but it doesn't work like that. They're falling over themselves, trying to use the same memory and variables.

Did you have any involvement with *Bandersnatch* and *Psyclapse*, the infamous 'mega-games'?

I was friends with people like Jon Gibson and Eugene Evans, who were working on those videogames. They'd come and join in and see what the rest of us were doing but we weren't allowed access to their suite of offices. They became known as 'The A-Team'! I remember seeing them once, all sat on the floor trying to link up these SAGE computers to share data. They never got it working though.

Colin, is that you, rubbing your eyes and shaking your head in despair about two minutes into the *Commercial Breaks* documentary that caught the dramatic implosion of Imagine Software on camera back in 1984?

(laughs) Yes, that's me, using a SAGE 4 linked to a Commodore 64. I was working on a game aimed at three to four-year-olds, getting them to match shapes and colours. I think Imagine thought they'd spotted a niche in the market for games for toddlers.

Imagine had many interesting ideas but it all went horribly wrong and ended in bankruptcy. When did you realise things were falling apart there?

The first indication was when my wages didn't go into the bank! I'd joined them in January 1984 and by May, problems were becoming apparent. I'd just taken out a mortgage and I thought I was going to lose my house!

Were you there when the bailiffs arrived at Imagine?

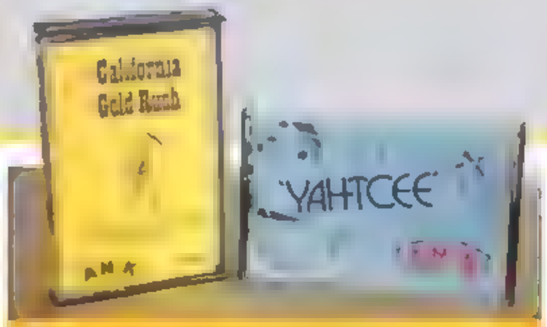
Yes, I was at work that day. I don't drink so I wasn't at the pub like most of the others. I used my own C64, two disk drives and a printer at Imagine and I had the dickens of a job convincing the bailiffs they were mine. They asked me for receipts and I said, 'come on, look at it, it's hardly state of the art stuff!' They took my word in the end. I left the building with all my equipment under my arms and that was that.

How did you end up working for Software Projects?

There was an advert in the *Liverpool Echo* and about 20 of us applied from Imagine for two jobs. It was a lot smaller operation but they took four of us on, maybe out of pity. I was interviewed by Alan Maton and Tommy Barton (co-founders of Software Projects with Matthew Smith) and I think I got a job because I'd actually got some completed projects under my belt. Not everyone from Imagine had...

Did you see very much of Matthew Smith back then?

He'd come into the office, but not very often. I never saw him working on a game, just on things that interested him from an academic point of view but with no practical application. He spent weeks writing a programme that had little grains of sand, or maybe it was snow, falling from the top of the screen, collecting at the bottom. That was it.



Colin's *California Gold Rush* and his brother Frank's *Yahtcee*, both for the CBM were released through Anirog. Neither of them received a penny for their work

> “Dave Lawson at Imagine Software asked me if I'd taught myself to code. I said, 'we've all taught ourselves, haven't we?'”

Your first game for them was *Harvey Smith Showjumper*. Erm, show jumping isn't a sport that you would normally associate with videogames.

It was Tommy Barton's idea. I just said, 'Do you think a show jumping game will sell?' He said, 'Yeah if we put the right spin on it.' The whole concept was mine after that, how the game looked and worked. The horse was done by my wife Janet. She used the famous sequence of photos taken by Muybridge (circa 1872) to show a horse galloping. Effectively, those pictures were turned into pixels. It was painstaking work!

Having a household name like Harvey Smith on the cover must have helped publicise the game.

Actually, the week before it was released, Harvey Smith walked off with someone else's wife and that was big news back then! Suddenly we got word that Boots, WHSmith and an enormous number of high street shops wouldn't stock our game! That had to affect sales.

We bet you felt like giving Harvey one of his own trademark two-fingered salutes. Did you have better luck with your involvement with *Dragon's Lair*?

We had an actual arcade machine in a corridor in the Software Projects offices. We'd play some and then talk about how to do it on the Commodore 64. There had to be compromises obviously. I'd be pacing up and down in the office in the early hours of the morning sometimes, thinking of what to do.

The original *Dragon's Lair* for the Commodore 64 was largely a port of the Coleco Adam version, but it looks like you had more of a free hand to develop your own levels for the sequel, *Escape From Singe's Castle*.

Both games were a group effort. For the first *Dragon's Lair*, I produced the primitive sound driver and some of the tunes, and worked on coding a couple of the levels in conjunction with John Darnell. Certainly, most of the coding was his. We developed this technique so while you were playing one section, the next one was loading into memory. For the sequel, I remember designing the opening 'rapids' level. I had the problem of making Dirk disappear as he went over each layer of water to reappear smaller, on a lower level... It's not as simple as it sounds!

You left Software Projects before *Dragon's Lair II* was released. What happened there?

I had a disagreement with Tommy Barton over a Christmas bonus, which he promised and then never paid me. I went back after Christmas – this would be 1987 – and was working on *Singe's Castle* when I got a call from Colin Stokes from Ocean who I knew from Imagine days. He offered me a lot more money and he said they'd pay the commuting costs from Liverpool to Manchester, so I said I'd love to join them. Tommy was not happy. He refused to pay me the holiday money I was due, so I

YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

We quizzed Colin in his Northamptonshire home with your questions and he duly responded between bouts of coding on his Atari ST...

Northway: Was it easy to convert *Head Over Heels* from one CPU architecture to another?

No, it was very tricky. Jon Ritman's code was tremendously well commented so I knew in English what it was supposed to do but I didn't understand the mechanics of how it worked! But that didn't matter as long as my routines did the same thing. We'd feed data in and if it came out the same for mine as it did his, we'd cracked it! I was on the phone a lot to Jon if I had a problem and he'd help me as much as he could.

Merman: Was there a lot of code sharing among the in-house team at Ocean?

Apart from people working on the same project, not really. We didn't tend to do that, though I think Paul Hughes got his hands on stuff! I don't think it was a matter of rivalry, it was just, 'this is what we're working on, that's what you're working on'. We'd frequently discuss methodology of how to get a particular effect working, though. Like that anti-scrolling device I used for *Operation Wolf* – I was happy to share that with whoever wanted to use it.

Mayhem: How difficult was it getting *Operation Wolf* into a single load rather than a multi-load?

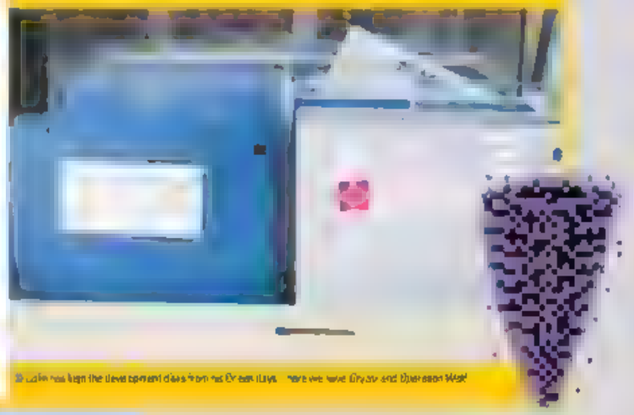
We used quite a lot of compression techniques. A lot of picture data, believe it or not, consists of zeroes. If you've got a stretch of ground the same colour, you can just say 'I want this colour forty times'. It was a challenge, but it was something we knew we had to do right from the start.

FGasking: Was your brother Frank Porch a programmer too?

Yes, he wrote a game called *Yahtcee* in BASIC for Anirog, the same company I did *California Gold Rush* for, and with the same result. We never got a penny from them!

DRS: Was programming on the Game Boy very different to the C64?

They had similar processors but I thought the Game Boy was a really awful machine to work with. To keep the costs down, Nintendo had used the same registers or processors, call them what you like, to do different things at different times during its cycle. One processor might be responsible for updating graphics and the same one would do something with the sound but at a different time in its refresh cycle. If you tried to change one when it was handling the other, it just collapsed.



Colin has kept the development dev kits he's built over the years – here we see Dragon and Dragon Wolf

kept the disk with the game. I was working on as insurance – if they did up. Tommy had the police sent to my house saying I'd stolen his property rang Colin saying I had a problem and he said, give them the disk back and we'll pay the holiday money he owes you. And off I went to the dungeons of Ocean in Manchester!

Those dungeons are famed for 'arcade alley', which housed the original arcade cabinets Ocean were converting for home computers. Is that where you were told you would be handling C64 versions of *Gryzor* and *Operation Wolf*?

At Ocean, they always let you see the game and asked you if you thought you could do it. I knew the technical limitations of the C64 inside out but I was hopeless at games that need fast reactions, so I'd get people like Lee Cowley to play it so I could decide whether I thought it was feasible.

You collaborated with David Blake on both of those games. Was it a good working relationship?

He was a year younger than me and we were good friends most of the time but we did have umpteen arguments about technical stuff. Ocean had their own licensed assembler which they'd produced that gave you extra instructions and David would gally use these even though I kept telling him we didn't need them, and they used up extra memory and execution time.

*In C64, if *Gryzor* wasn't hard enough, you needed nerves like steel as well as fingers to play it*

It ended up like a teacher-student relationship and that's not what either of us wanted.

We really like your conversion of *Gryzor*, except for the fact that you jump by pressing the space bar. We have to play it with one of our bare feet on the keyboard, which isn't pretty.

[smiles wryly] We tried all sorts of things. We even considered taking the contacts off the joystick all together and just using the keyboard, but that wasn't popular. We needed another button and we just didn't have one in those days – the space bar is the biggest thing. It wasn't ideal but what else could we do?

When you saw the huge plastic machine gun on the front of the *Operation Wolf* cabinet, you must have thought, 'How the hell are we going to do *that* on the C64?'

[laughs] There was talk about using a light gun because they were available then, but they weren't very accurate. You had to have a whacking great target on screen – not a little individual soldier. Eventually we came up with the crosshair sight you controlled with the joystick.

How did you manage to scroll only a small portion of the screen so that it maintained an authentic arcade look?

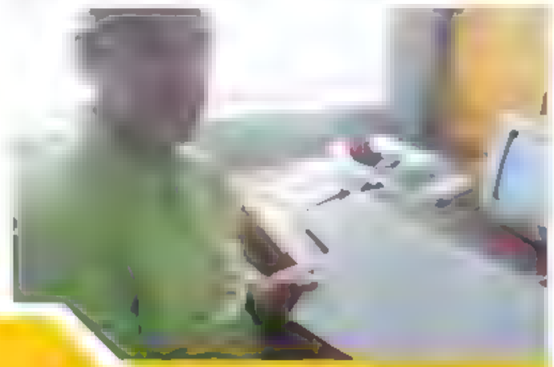
I got more communication from punters at the time over that than anything else. Everyone knew the C64 had this wonderfully smooth pixel by pixel scrolling but you had to scroll the whole screen. We took all the characters that made up the animation data on the right in the screen – the bombs and bullets and so on – and anti-scrolled them, manipulating their data in the opposite direction to the main screen. It appears that one part of the screen is scrolling and another is standing still. Where the two parts of the screen met there was a heap of a mess so we had the enemy sprite, a single sprite multiplexed down the screen. It covered the lot.

That's ingenious coding, Colin.

Everyone wanted to know how we'd interrupted the Commodore's scrolling mechanism. I was happy to share the trick though. Gary Bracey at Ocean said we should keep it to ourselves!

You took on a different type of conversion work with *Double Take*, converting it from the Spectrum to the C64.

I didn't really want to do it. In my mind there was very little that grabbed you and made you want to come back to it. I was given the concept but no code. We had a team of graphic designers who would design the screen and my job was to animate and control the objects they gave me. I just don't think the gameplay was there.



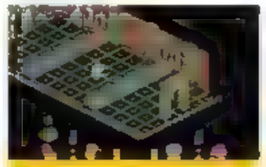
In Double Take, Colin's job was to animate the objects he was given

It sounds like you had more fun converting *Head Over Heels*.

Ocean showed me the game on an Amstrad and said, Jon Ritman [author of *Head Over Heels*] doesn't think you can do it! I have every respect for Jon – we're good friends – but I just think he was very aware of the speed restrictions inherent in the Commodore. I only found out years later that the version on the 64 and subsequently on the ST were different to the Spectrum version because he'd deliberately taken out some rooms that he was sure would be too long to process!

Did Jon offer you a lot of assistance with the task?

He came and saw me at Ocean, told me how the game worked, drew me some diagrams and gave me a listing of the Z80 code – I'm not a Z80 coder but I could follow what it was doing. It simply became a matter of making my routines do what his routines were doing. The maths involved was not trivial, I'll tell you!



*In Atari ST *Head Over Heels*, Colin coaxed the 16-bit computer to the same tune*

We imagine it could be very stressful... is it true you had a heart attack while working on the game?

I have a genetic condition known as SVT that affects my heart rate and it can cause me to pass out – which did happen a time or two at Ocean. It's not a heart attack but I know it's frightening to the people around me. I don't think stress helps but I did really enjoy my job at Ocean.

As the Nineties dawned, things must have changed at Ocean.

I got a call from Gary Bracey in 1991 effectively saying the home computer market was coming to an end but did I want to take on *Parasol Stars* for the C64 on a freelance basis? I knew they'd offered it to someone else who'd turned it down, saying it couldn't be done, and I looked at it and said, 'well, I'm not sure but I have a go.' They gave me a handsome advance and I went home and gave it my best. It was shaping up pretty nicely so I showed it to Ocean and they thought it was worth pursuing. Two months later I came home one afternoon and saw our vacuum cleaner in the middle of the front room and all my work disks underneath it. Some had actually been broken. My wife wasn't there so I started looking round the house and found her wardrobe empty.

Couldn't you have re-coded the game following the incident?

Yes, I still had the disk I'd shown Ocean two months earlier but they couldn't afford the time it would take me to catch up to where I'd got to and I think they were still unsure whether a C64 version was really feasible. Ocean were very sympathetic and didn't ask for any of their money back.

In Head Over Heels 2 for the ST, it shows my up nicely

Ah, is this the burglary we remember reading about in the videogame press at the time?

I never told Ocean that! No, my wife was an alcoholic and when she'd been drinking she was a different person. She'd run off to Scotland with her ex-husband. When I did eventually get in touch with her, I said, 'You didn't do me any favours destroying those disks, I'm out of work now.'

Did that misfortune signify the end of your involvement with videogames programming?

It was until last year, when I went to the Ocean reunion at Play Expo in Manchester. Back in 1989, I started to write my own sequel to *Head Over Heels* for the Atari ST, designing my own rooms and puzzles, and Gary Bracey asked whatever happened to it. I saw the code and the A-ar were gathering dust in my garage and he told me I should finish it! I've written this editor to help me create rooms and I've bought some isometric paper. Yes, you really can buy it. The game's a long way from completion but it's playable. Frank Gasking gave me Jon Ritman's email so I got in touch and he sent back this reply saying, '**** me sideways, I was only talking about you the other day. Give me a ring.' We had a long chat and, though he thinks Atari is over the hill, he's given me his blessing.

So you're back to bedroom coding 30 years after you first started.

Oh yes, it takes me back. I'm pacing up and down, thinking how to solve problems. The buzz is still there. The feeling of creativity, of producing something the way you want it to be, trying to get a piece of equipment to perform to your will. It's super.

Thanks to Colin and his wife Amy for their hospitality and to his brother Frank for the Amiga games photograph.

FIVE TO PLAY

The best releases from Colin's back catalogue

DRAGON'S LAIR II: ESCAPE FROM SINGE'S CASTLE

ADAPTING THE GRAUND-BREAKING laserdisc arcade game to home was as a doubly difficult challenge. You couldn't hope to replicate the graphical magic of *Dragon's Lair* on an 8-bit machine, and [illegible] left crudely exposed. Credit to Software Projects for interpreting some key scenes from the original machine and producing this surprisingly playable sequel, which scored a commendable 90 per cent in *Zzap!* issue 22 and is a considerable improvement on their first home conversion. Colin's rejoicing level is a cracking reprise though due to his acrimonious departure from Software Projects, the name was removed from the game's credits. We asked Colin whether this annoyed him. Ahh, forgiveness! Yes, his reply

HARVEY SMITH SHOWJUMPER

IT MAY NOT often be associated with videogames, but Colin managed to create an engrossing take on the sport of pelham wearing thrills, especially if played with a group of others. The 12 courses on offer can be supplemented through a handy course editor, allowing equestrian-leaning gamers to design their own series of fences – a pretty forward-thinking idea back in 1987. The horse gallops and clatters with impressive grace and made a second appearance in *Kane*, written by Colin's acting buddy John Darnell. Also note the in-game swimming fixtures, which include a dud for Jodie Runner, one of Colin's all-time favourite games – he began work on an Amstrad conversion of the game just before his departure from Software Projects.

GRYZOR

YOU, MAY AND WE as Contra fan, whatever you call the venerable run-and-gunner, you should be suitably impressed by this arcade conversion. Blasting your way through dense jungle and exploiting the enemy base is a stern challenge, made even more demanding by having to use the space bar to jump. Most gamers opted to use their feet, though we've been known to [illegible] using our forearms, such is the frustrating difficulty of the game. Still, if you're up to the task, there's much to enjoy in the blasting and bullet-dodging. Collecting power-ups and new weapons keeps things interesting and, considering the fact that Colin wasn't an arcade gamer, this does a fine job of capturing the spirit of the original.

OPERATION WOLF

CONVERTING ANY ARCADE coin-op hit to humble home micro can be a serious challenge, but when the original has an iron-hard [illegible] and its control screen you know you're really up against it. Having initially contemplated using a lightgun peripheral, Colin and his fellow coder David Blake decided to use a joystick-guided crosshair to control your gun fire – it works far better than might be expected. The ingenious scrolling [illegible] Ocean's most successful arcade alert. *Zzap!* made it a Sizzler in issue 45, received up a Golden [illegible] award and is definitely still worth a blast today.

HEAD OVER HEELS

OF ALL THE games Colin worked on in the Eighties and early Nineties, this is the one he's most proud of. A sterling conversion of Jon Ritman and Bernie Drummond's isometric [illegible] adventure, this earned a Gold Medal from *Zzap!*, scoring a whopping 98 per cent – the joint highest in the magazine's history. Colin was so taken with the game he actually promoted the ST and Amiga versions at home in his spare time and then sold them to Ocean as a freelance favour. He's not finished with *Head Over Heels* yet, either. He's currently reviving a sequel he began work on in 1989 and, having played a 'work in progress' on Colin's rusty ST, we can supply report that it's looking rather [illegible]

Rage Racer

PlayStation
Namco
1997

***Rage Racer* was the game I'd waited for ever since playing *Stunt Car Racer* on the Spectrum.**

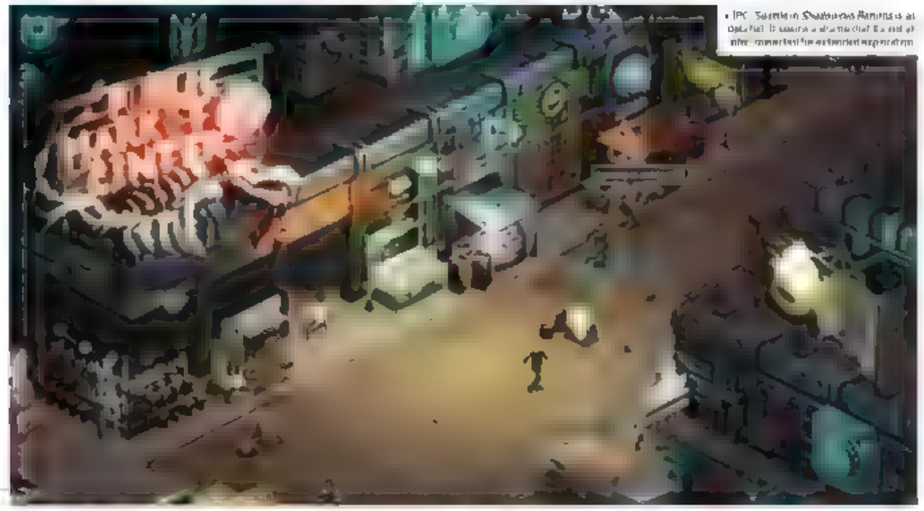
Geoff Richmond's title featured a series of increasingly outrageous courses, culminating in the Rollercoaster track and its dizzyingly climb and drop. It was brilliantly over the top compared to other racing games where tracks consisted of the usual straights and corners with the odd kink or dip. When *Rage Racer* appeared on PlayStation its tracks were in something from an extreme sport video – this was the closest thing to *Stunt Car Racer* available in the 32-bit era.

The game doesn't mess about. Having passed the first straight, you're soon climbing towards a impressive bridge, a tunnel next to a cascading waterfall, a tunnel inside a rock spur, a sharp left and a hairpin right to finish. Over Rose City – that offers the most spectacular ride. The road snakes down through the tunnel before swinging steeply uphill, forcing you to drop gears to maintain speed as you approach the summit. It's even more impressive later on when you knock the eye-catcher blocks and get to zoom down the pass.

There are lots of things to love about *Rage Racer*. The car customisation options add to the gameplay, without being fiddly. And as you progress through the classes – GP Mode you'll even court some thrilling night and rock battles for first place. The game also introduces the first proper appearance of series maestro Reiko Nagase. But, of all the finest, *Rage Racer* is all about the ride. ★

RETRORATED

>> It's been a bit of a quiet month, so we've decided to mainly focus on the rather triumphant return of Shadowrun. We also take a gander at Capcom's remake of DuckTales, Ubisoft's Flashback update and the PC version of Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow



• PC: Sammlin Shadowrun Returns is at [illegible]

Shadowrun Returns

NEVER, EVER, CUT A DEAL WITH A DRAGON

INFORMATION

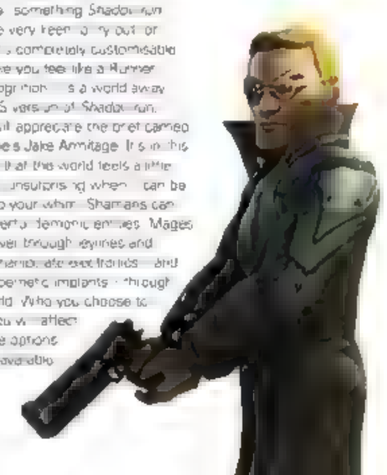
- FEATURED SYSTEM: PC
- ALSO AVAILABLE ON: OS X, LINUX
- RELEASED: OUT NOW
- PRICE: £14.99
- PUBLISHER: HARBRAINED SCHEMES
- DEVELOPER: HARBRAINED SCHEMES
- PLAYERS: 1

It's probably best to start with a warning. *Shadowrun Returns* isn't much like the videogames you remember, at least on a technical level. Where both the SNES and Mega Drive equivalents opted for a more real-time oriented form of RPG combat, *Shadowrun Returns* favours turn-based – more akin to the rules of the tabletop version that spawned the series in the first place.

But that's a minor aside, because everything you could hope for from a Shadowrun game is here, something that pleases us greatly. This dystopian cyberpunk world is as rich as it ever was, and the efforts made to immerse you are fantastic. It's living proof that you don't need voice acting, impressive lip-synching or cut scenes to create a world that you want to explore. This is thanks to the quality of writing, which manages to flesh out a character before they ever start speaking. Outside of the short descriptions of areas you'll, however, find the dialogue system that lends you that a sense of your own character too. Picking one option over another doesn't necessarily restrict or benefit you in any way, but it sure as hell makes you feel a little more attached to what could have been a dull, as easily have been a one-dimensional script.

The underlying levelling-up system benefits from similar personal choices too. You've a host of races and classes available to you from the start, and while you may pick Mage from the beginning you could end up more akin to a sword-wielding Street Samurai – something Shadowrun experts will be very keen to try out for themselves. It's completely customisable and helps make you feel like a Runner worthy of recognition in a world away from the SNES version of Shadowrun. Though fans will appreciate the brief cameo from that game's Jake Armitage. It's in this customisation that the world feels a little more tangible, insofar as what can be manipulated to your whim. Shamans can summon powerful demonic enemies, Mages can boost power through leylines and Deckers can hack data exchanges, and those with cybernetic implants – through the digital world. Who you choose to accompany you will affect which of these options and more are available.

• PC: Combat can happen at any time, and when it does, you need to be ready for it

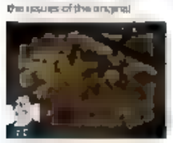


★ PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN

Duck Tales Remastered

A enjoyable remake from Wayforward that looks beautiful and corrects many of the issues of the original

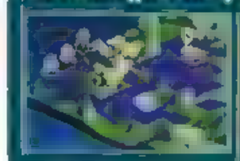


DAVID

Shadowrun Returns

It has been a long time, but the wait for Shadowrun Returns is certainly worth it. A great Kickstarter success story

Similar games you must play



Final Fantasy Tactics (1997)

Though Tactics Ogre was [illegible] to introduce mechanics of strategy RPGs that were [illegible] now and love these days, the Final Fantasy Tactics that popularised the genre, starting with the deal that the name Final Fantasy had during the PlayStation era. Nevertheless, it's a great way to learn basics, though you may want to wait for the PSP version.

Ogre Battle: The March Of The Black Queen (1993)

This unique blend of strategy and RPG hasn't been matched since. It received limited popularity in the West when it came out on the SNES, but the depth of its combat system is worth your time alone. Luckily, it is available on the Virtual Console, giving you a chance to play this gripping RPG.

XCOM: Enemy Unknown (2012)

Another classic franchise had a modern revitalisation recently, as XCOM: Enemy Unknown rewarded us that the mountain is us just fine. Fashion everything that can go wrong does go wrong. More strategy than RPG, it is certainly also a game that you need to play – if only to appreciate those brilliant voiced [illegible].

Fallout (1997)

A completely different kind of dystopia, Fallout popularised post-apocalyptic games for shows a level of similarity with Shadowrun thanks to its depth of writing, its world and its combat. It's predecessor, Mountain, even took its Wasteland to a sequel headed up by Brian Fargo himself. Its heroes potentially pave the way for, also, the search Fallout 4.

Inquisitor (2000)

This was first released in 1998 but took three years to translate into English. A classic take on Asian-style RPGs, this is more famous than Shadowrun's rarity but an intriguing one all the same. Filled to the brim with demons, dragons and other beasties, it's pre-Diablo after Diablo and all the glorious retro gaming goodness that comes with it.

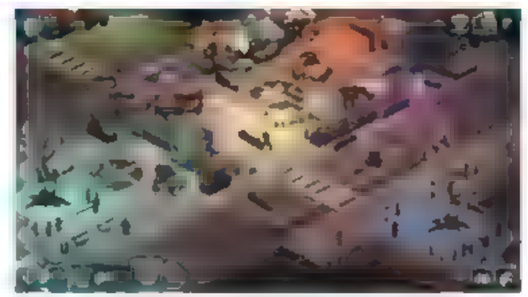
to you, again trying to tie a game based on your choices.

Combat itself is pretty tricky, especially earlier on. Dice – based to steamroll groups of Gangers and Corp troopers until you've levelled up a good deal and equipped the gear to go with it. Thankfully it's not too complex to comprehend: each character gets two actions a turn – whether moving, shooting, reloading or what have you – and after that it's the enemies' turn. The key is sensing movement and protection, a similar system to last year's *XCOM: Enemy Unknown*. Certain environmental objects can provide either basic or full protection, while sensible manipulation of chairs and walls will block the line of sight of potential attackers.

Where *Shadowrun Returns* does differ from *XCOM* is in its exploration and it's here that it resembles its retro predecessors much more. Each environment – though often quite vast – is a separate instance in itself, but with side quests, non-player characters to chat with and short battles to be fought in them, there is an style for *Shadowrun Returns* is spot on, an outstanding upgrade for anyone raised on the sometimes glory of the SNES version. There's plenty of detail throughout each environment, whether dilapidated flats, dens, a futuristic chip fair, plaques, mines in much the same way as Tokyo's or fancy corporate lobbies and office structures. You, Shadow Runner, will experience them all, and Harebrained Schemes has done a fantastic job of creating a world filled with ephemeral goodies to explore. It's just a shame that many of these pieces are in the more fair passing, as since in most cases you'll be shipped off to whatever location you're next needed at. It does feel like this, *Shadowrun* would've been better suited to being more open, as its SNES and Mega Drive versions were, to foster that sense of place throughout your experience. It's a minor distraction, perhaps, but a notable one for fans of the originals.

Sadly, the story of *Shadowrun Returns* isn't quite as grand as we'd hoped either. Though its writing is exceptional, the tale itself is lacking somewhat. You'll be tasked with determining the cause of an old friend's demise in the hopes of uncovering 100,000 Nuyen – Shadowrun's currency. This will intertwine with a number of related events, primarily among them being an unusual string of murders. It's intriguing, that much is true, but with a world as rich as *Shadowrun Returns* feels like a touch of a shame for it to fall on such an important hurdle.

But then, this is just the beginning for *Shadowrun Returns*. Released alongside the game is the very same editor used to build the main campaign and, while more campaigns are promised by Harebrained Schemes as DLC, it's here that we should be excited. Fans will be free to craft their own stories, and someone has already begun rebuilding the entire SNES original. It's in the Steam Workshop support that *Shadowrun Returns* really begins to shine.



• PC: Combat is simultaneously simple to understand and challenging to master, just the way it should be.

• PC: This is a place from the user creation Shadowrun Reboot, and is pretty impressive. This will be one to keep an eye on.

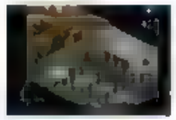
• PC: Combat is [illegible] and [illegible] you to unlock more skills and classes [illegible] you have enough money

BRIEF HISTORY

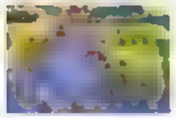
» Before it found success on the SNES, *Shadowrun* was a popular pen and paper RPG. It deviatingly received a number of follow-up games that were a markedly different to each other. The biggest hitter was FASA Studio's massive MMO on Xbox 360 and PC, which tried to popularise RPG into a hybrid FPS.

★ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SHADOWRUN (SNES)



▼ FIRE EMBLEM: AWAKENING (3DS)



In a nutshell

It's a short campaign, but this remains a must play, thanks to solid combat mechanics, brilliant writing and a bright future with the in-game editor

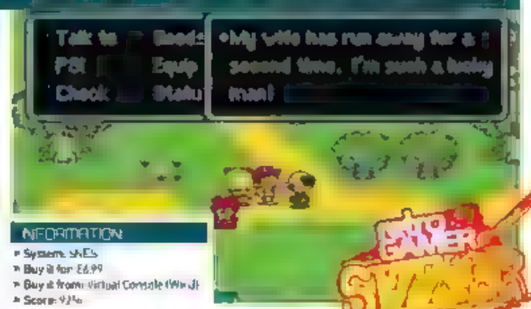
Adam Barnes

>> Score **85%**

RETROROUND-UP

>> Every month we look at all the classics and latest releases that are available to buy or download

DOWNLOAD OF THE MONTH



INFORMATION
- System: SNES
- Buy it for: £6.99
- Buy it from: Virtual Console (Wii U)
- Score: 92%

Earthbound

Originally released on the SNES in 1994 (with a US release in 1995) *Earthbound* is one of the few SNES RPGs to not receive a European localisation. As a result it now reaches insanely 'e' prices on eBay, with a fully completed game leaving the original boxed form £400. Thank goodness, then, that Nintendo has finally released this quirky RPG on Virtual Console, allowing a new generation of gamers to find out if it really is worth all that fuss.

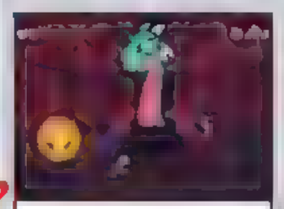
The first thing that strikes you about *Earthbound* is its sheer cuteness. There's a delightful style to the visuals that makes it completely different to other SNES RPGs of the time, and it makes it stand out today. The soundtrack is of a similar standard, composed for the most part of cheerful breezy tunes that perfectly suit the onscreen shenanigans.

There's more to *Earthbound* than nice aesthetics however, and it really shines when it comes to gameplay and combat. It's certainly challenging – perhaps a little too challenging at times – but as your party grows, the difficulty does not better, even if Ness is still stronger than his companions.

There are no random encounters in *Earthbound*, allowing you to move away from the dull grinding found in many similar RPGs. The combat is also sound, with a character's health shown on a rotating dial that slowly counts down to zero, giving you the chance to heal a character before they die. There's even the option to let the AI fight for you. They're neat mechanics in a game filled with neat ideas, and really help *Earthbound* stand apart from its peers. *Earthbound*'s story also feels different to the norm, being packed with cultural references, aliens and other oddities, while your party consists of a group of kids that are a world away from the hyperbole stereotypes found within the genre.

Earthbound certainly isn't perfect – due to its steep learning curve – but get past that and you'll discover a timeless classic that really has matured with age.

>> OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

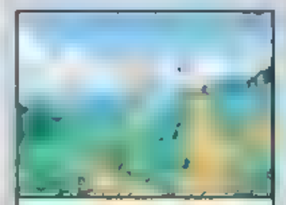


DuckTales Remastered
- System: [illegible]
- Buy it for: [illegible]
- Buy it from: [illegible]
- Score: [illegible]

[illegible] Duck's classic aesthetics. Crammed with charming animations and [illegible] along the talent of the original artwork, [illegible] updated but will [illegible] and delighted. It's a pity then that the game doesn't last long, for some amount of [illegible] making the game [illegible] an afternoon's hour through, and while the [illegible] will more you wanting the sheer love poured into [illegible] will keep you playing.

Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow Ultimate Edition
- System: [illegible]
- Buy it for: [illegible]
- Buy it from: [illegible]
- Score: [illegible]

The original [illegible] well, certainly tells us [illegible] original release [illegible] your [illegible] the game's [illegible] the [illegible] thanks [illegible] the game's [illegible] the [illegible] the [illegible] additions only [illegible] an already big game, while the [illegible] greatly improves the story. A highly [illegible] addition.

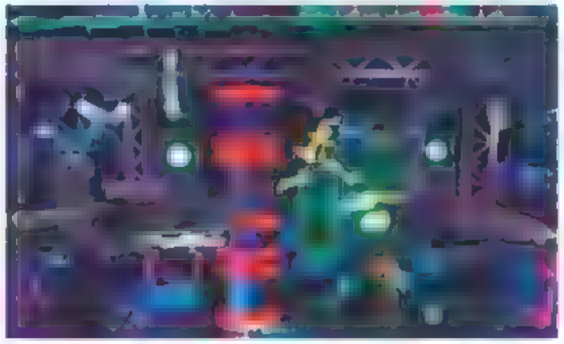


Worms 3
- System: [illegible]
- Buy it for: [illegible]
- Buy it from: App Store
- Score: [illegible]

You have [illegible] Team 17 [illegible] years [illegible] the [illegible] worms [illegible] identity [illegible] series [illegible] franchise. The latest installment is a good one, featuring worms with different abilities for [illegible] and [illegible] whether you're playing [illegible] the [illegible] mode. The AI's some [illegible] but it comes alive as usual in multiplayer.

Pac-Man Dash
- System: [illegible] Android
- Buy it for: [illegible]
- Buy it from: App Store/Google Play
- Score: 58%

Pac-Man dash, game [illegible] runner [illegible] gobbling ghosts [illegible] while [illegible] a variety of [illegible] Although fun, Namco has sadly limited the amount of time you can play meaning you either have a lot of [illegible] or [illegible] time on your hands. The graphics [illegible] and [illegible] with the better based [illegible] Dash indeed.



Flashback

- System: Xbox 360
- Buy it for: [illegible] points
- Buy it from: Xbox Live Arcade
- Score: 56%

We had high hopes for *Flashback*, but somewhere along the way it's been awkwardly fumbled. Conrad B Hart has been turned into an annoying cliche spouting out crap like "awesome source" while the controls never feel as precise as they needed to be, making for some awkward jumping and shooting.

It nicely expands upon the events of the original game, but often feels half-hearted, with new additions like 3D goggles and an X System often feeling underdeveloped. Even having the single a game-based feels underwhelming due to it being stuck into an unrealistic arcade cabinet, greatly reducing its playing area for no reason. The intentions are certainly noble, but this new *Flashback* is a missed opportunity.

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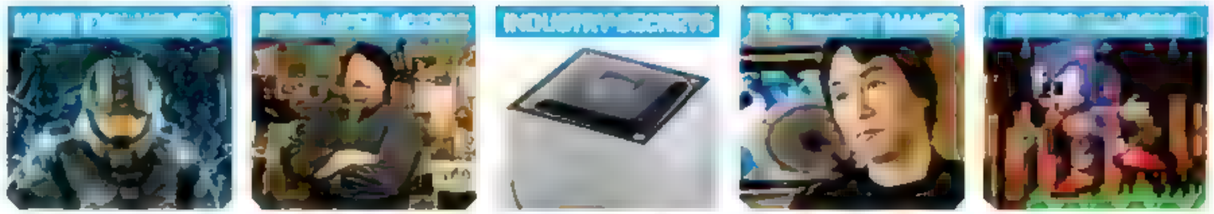

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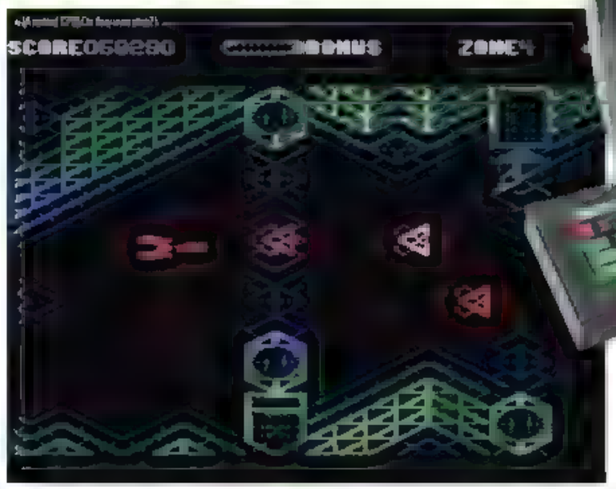
HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at **retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk**

After spending a fair bit of time with the Amstrad 16K ROM entries, I've realised just how much I like games programming competitions; the only 'problem' they present when it comes to writing reviews is that, with all of those new releases, I usually can't cover absolutely everything I'd like to here. *Hopefully* the solution I've gone for this time works so it can be used for future ABBUC, RGCD 16K or MSXdev events



AMSTRAD CPC 16K ROM COMPETITION

FORMAT: AMSTRAD CPC
DEVELOPER: VARIOUS
LINK: WWW.KASTARTZ.EU/CPC-16K-2013
RELEASE: 2013
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: JASON ARBER

The Amstrad CPC 16K ROM Game Development Competition ran on the CPC Wiki website between January and June 2013 and, as the name probably suggests, all prospective entrants were required to cram their game into a mere 16K during that six month period. Although that doesn't sound like a lot, in the right hands there's enough room in 16,384 bytes to produce a solid game, which is demonstrated by the two puzzlers and two action games that were released before the deadline.

To start with there's *Overbogan*, which is an implementation of the classic warehouse-based puzzle Sokoban where the objective is to rake the crates safely around an unusually shaped warehouse floor and, without getting any irreversibly stuck against walls, push all of them into the marked storage areas. The classic Sokoban levels have been used so the difficulty is high straight from the first floor, but there are no time or move limits to worry about so players have quite a bit of thinking time to work out a way to beat the stage and how to optimise their strategy for the lowest number of moves.

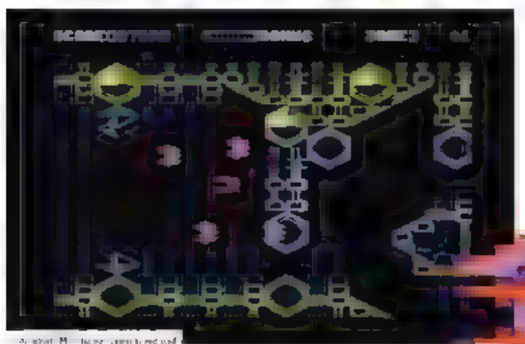
The second puzzler isn't as sedately paced. *Sudeva Puzzle* sees the player take control of a cute looking insect that must be guided around to collect coins and a key in each stage in order to progress. To make things a little trickier there are one-way doors and slippery tiles that limit how the insect can move and some of the stages have static traps and mobile enemies to avoid as well. Ticking away relentlessly in the background is a time limit, so pausing too long to think isn't advised.

Cyber Hawk is a first-person space shooter set in the near future where mankind is after harvesting an alien world of gain chicken the creatures all disappear extinction, now forced to defend itself from the poultry uprising. Swarms of space-suited avians flap their way past the sights of the last remaining impulse cannon that must be used to save the day by firing well-timed shots to blast the invaders into nuggets.

Finally, we come to *Relentless*, a horizontally scrolling shoot-em-up from Paul Alexander Koostra, far far away with almost all the gangs. It's a shooter that incessantly lobs attack waves and ground-based gun turrets at the player with fast, smooth scrolling and colourful graphics. The default difficulty setting offers a decent challenge, which is pretty much what we've come to expect from the author of *Star Scare* and *Need Or Time*.

Looking at the competition as a whole we feel that it went well. Four games is reasonable for a first go and, although it's a shame that some of the announced games like *The Dungeons Of Count Roland* were completed, what was released is impressive both technically and to play. Overall, *Relentless* is the best of the bunch, but the other three are very enjoyable as well.

81%



THE SPECCIES

FORMAT: SPECTRUM · DEVELOPER: TAROS REMAKES
DOWNLOAD: WWW.KASTART.EU/SPECIES.RAR · PRICE: FREE

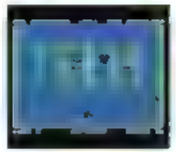
The Speccies are cute little critters that were struggling to get to their various colour-coded homes until help arrived in the form of a huge cursor that could guide them around. What makes the cursor's job more difficult is that, although they're adorable little beings, the average Speccy isn't particularly bright and, when set in motion, will just keep on rolling until an obstacle gets in the way. Manoeuvring all of the Speccies to the correctly coloured pad on each stage takes some forward planning, clever use of the environment and sometimes another Speccy as a temporary barrier to line things up correctly.

The Speccies was put together by Steve Horguist who was behind the well-received port of *Dingo* to the Spectrum a couple of years ago. The result of his labour and some great graphics from Craig Stevenson is a good looking and taxing puzzler.

85%

MALAIKA

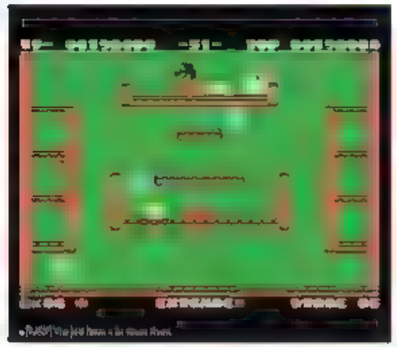
FORMAT: MSX · DEVELOPER: RELEVO STUDIOS
DOWNLOAD: WWW.KASTART.EU/BATZ-ZX81 · PRICE: FREE



The prehistoric world has been wiped out by dinosaurs and Malaika is the only person evolved enough to walk upright. Anybody taking on the alien horde unarmed wouldn't stand the slimmest chance but Malaika's resourceful by following the pang she usually keeps in her hand she can stun enemies before running over them for the kill. Each stage has a series of platforms populated by prehistoric creatures and it's up to the lass to defeat them. Vanquished foes leave behind trinkets and if the letters for the word extended are collected, a new life is handed out.

Anyone who has played *Bubble Bobble* should find the gameplay familiar with stunned enemies recovering to become more aggressive if not dealt with promptly and stages where the wrap-around play area comes in handy to reach otherwise inaccessible platforms.

Malaika is a fun single screen action game with appropriately bright colours and cheerful sound.



BATZ

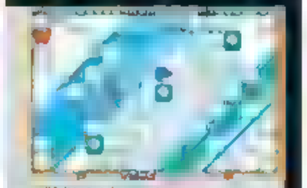
FORMAT: ZX EXPANDED ZX81 · DEVELOPER: PETER Z
DOWNLOAD: WWW.KASTART.EU/BATZ-ZX81 · PRICE: FREE

***Batz* is a** *Breakout*-style game for the ZX81 so the objective is to demolish a wall at the top of each screen by smashing a ball against it. The ball must be kept in play with the keyboard controlled paddle at the bottom of the screen and each stage has a different pattern of bricks, some of which will need more than one hit before they're demolished.

It is well executed and supports ZX81 add-ons for sound, but we found *Batz* to be a little disappointing, there aren't any power-ups or enemies so the only variety between stages is the shape of the wall. That doesn't make it a bad game and what's there is fun, but we've probably been spoilt by what *Arkanoid* brought to the table. Adding collectable items or multi-ball would have increased its longevity.

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



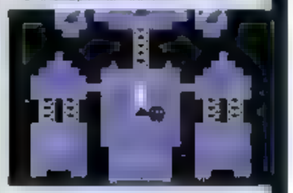
TIGA. It's a kind of a concept.

Breaking The Ice

The original version of *Pango* variant *Waimanu* was released earlier in the year for the OS and is a cute re-imagining of the ice-pushing and creature-squishing action game. The developer, Disorbited Studio, has just released a Game Boy Advance conversion and those with the relevant hardware or a decent emulator can pick up a ROM image by pointing their web browser at kastart.eu/pangwin-gba.

Here's one I made earlier

Hot on the heels of *Arcade Game Designer* comes David Hughes' *Classic Game Designer*, a Spectrum game creation tool for building the sort of simple arcade game seen in the early Eighties. The news of CGD arrived a little too late to properly review it for this issue so we will instead give it a once over next issue. In the meantime kastart.eu/cgd-spec goes to the appropriate World Of Spectrum thread.



TIGA. Smooth vertical scrolling on the TI-99/4A.

In Space, nobody eats ice cream

We've recently seen the early stages of some scrolling shoot-'em-ups for the Texas TI-99/4A and, judging by what the developer has said at Atari Age, these are proof of concept for other projects but may also become a game in their own right. kastart.eu/scroll-texas will whisk visitors over to the relevant Atari Age thread which contains a couple of work-in-progress videos.

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

DEEP, DARK DUNGEONS

Dark Quest is a turn-based role playing style game with a fantasy theme available from XBLIG. The player takes control of a barbarian who has been asked to save the land from a dark sorcerer and his evil minions and as his quest through dungeons progresses, he'll meet others with a common aim who can be persuaded join his party. We've given this a quick try and it works pretty well: fans of fantasy-based RPGs with an Xbox 360 can have a look behind nikstart.eu/dark-quest-xblig and give the demonstrable a try.

WHICH WITCH IS WHICH?

We're not quite sure how old it actually is – the date on the game says 2007, the documentation 2008 but all the announcements drawn to our attention reckon this year – but there's a Windows remake of *Cauldron* available. For anyone who hasn't played it, *Cauldron* is about a witch trying to collect ingredients for a spell that will rid the land of an evil pumpkin. The download is at nikstart.eu/cauldron-win

FLASH OF BOREDOM

MORE GAMES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING...

TOY PLANE

DOWNLOAD: WWW.NIKSTART.EU/TOY-PLANE-XBLIG

Toy Plane **is** a reworking of the helicopter games that were popular a few years back such as Copter Game: the controls are very simple, hold A to make the plane accelerate upwards and release A to fly gradually back down.

Unlike the original game however, the randomly generated levels have been replaced by designed stages, each with a quota of stars and rings to fly through which unlock the next. The plane will also take a couple of sonic impacts against its surroundings before blowing up.

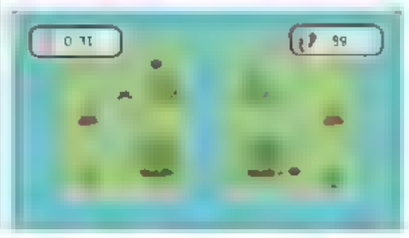
These updated and the graphical reworking make *Toy Plane* a more substantial game and the level layouts are challenging as well.

REFLECTION

DOWNLOAD: WWW.NIKSTART.EU/REFLECTION-XBLIG

The objective of *Reflection* is deceptively simple: the player takes control of two avatars and has to position them both on their own floor switches to complete a stage. This is far harder than it sounds of course, because both characters are steered with the same control stick, with one inverting any control instructions he receives.

While the controls are mirrored, the mirrors only appear to be at first glance: the buttons are placed differently on each side and variations in the furniture have to be used to reveal where the regular sprite and his reflection are in relation to each other. Reflection throws the player at all the deep end but is a solid, playable puzzler once you've worked out



BRUCE LEE II

DOWNLOAD: WWW.NIKSTART.EU/BRUCE-LEE-II-WIN

Arriving around three decades after the 8-bit versions, *Bruce Lee II* takes the gameplay elements of the Datasoft original and creates a different world for Bruce and his enemies to inhabit. The game can be slimmed to look like an Amstrad CPC or Commodore 64 – sadly the Atari 8-bit does not get a look in – despite being one of the more platforms – and along with many authentic looking in-game graphics developer Bruno R. Marcos has designed some new baddies which fit into the very 8-bit environment. These certainly add variety, include a very tall Kareem Abdul-Jabbar sprite and a suitably easy Chuck Norris.

As with the original game, Bruce must collect artefacts to complete his mission. The newly created screens are devious enough that they'd happily fit into the original and even if he ignores his assailants completely, there are still a huge number of inconveniently placed defences that can eviscerate poor Bruce. Sadly there's no in-game scoring for all those hard-fought victories over Chuck and Kareem so the replay value isn't as high as it could be, but fans of the original should find some amusement in this well-presented homage. And – any 8-bit coders are reading, this one's worth considering or conversion.

HOMEBREW HEROES

JONATHAN CAULDWELL HAS BEEN SHARING SOME OF HIS SECRETS AGAIN WITH THE LATEST VERSION OF ARCADE GAME DESIGNER. AGD HAS BEEN AROUND FOR A FEW YEARS, SO WE ASKED HIM ABOUT ITS PAST, PRESENT AND, INDEED, FUTURE

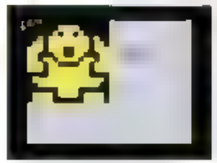
So, to start with, where did *Arcade Game Designer* begin?

I started with the idea early in 2008. It had always seemed that, back in the day, arcade-game designers had only let the user change a few aspects of the game such as the graphics, sounds and screen layouts. These that had offered more flexibility were slow and very few programs actually produced standalone games at the end of the process. I had already written *Platform Game Designer* and figured I could take some of the principles of that, put them together with a basic but fast and more flexible engine and let the user determine the logic with a simple scripting language. A few weeks of coding later, I had something I could tentatively show to a few 8-bit enthusiasts who might be interested in producing their own games. So I started a thread over at World Of Spectrum.

What has shaped it over the years? Is there a community of users offering suggestions?

Yes, there are plenty of users and many of them can be found regularly on the private AGD forums – arcadegamedesigner.proboards.com – posting tips, reporting bugs or requesting more functionality. I often post tips and answer questions there myself. It's a great place for advice on creating games with the tools. Besides that, I get to hear about problems or requests for features so I can track down bugs or make other changes to generally improve things. That's how AGD has evolved over the years.

While we're on the subject of the AGD community, an honorable mention must also go to Paul Jenkinson not only for having written several AGD games himself but for producing a fantastic series of YouTube tutorial videos – and now he's also produced an AGD Playground video which is pretty fun.



AGD has matured over the years, so do you have plans to expand it further?

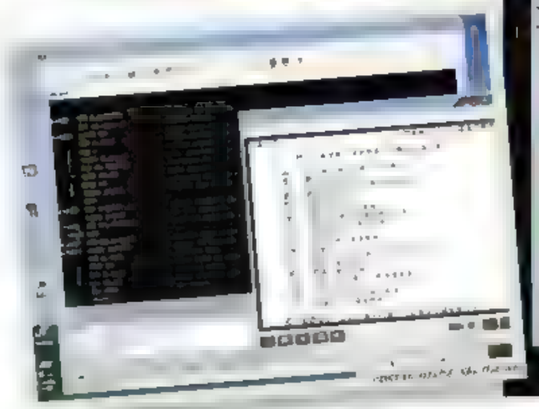
Maybe. But I won't be adding a lot of new features for a while. I've recently ported AGD over to the Amstrad CPC and may consider conversions for other platforms. Meanwhile, Tony Thompson has added his TommyGun editor to work with AGD and, ultimately, we'd like to create a multi-platform 8-bit game development tool for the PC. The idea is that users can design the game in a GUI environment then automatically generate emulator files for a number of 8-bit machines. However, we would need to recruit more developers to add 6502 or 6809-based machines.

Have there been features that seemed a good idea but didn't work in practise?

I'm not convinced that Kempston Mouse support will be much use, but it was requested by a couple of users so it's there now. There are several features which haven't been used very often, like the Dizzy/Magic Knight style menus. These will remain here for anyone who wants to create arcade adventures. The DIG and FIND commands were hardly ever used, so they've sort of been replaced in AGD 4. It's no longer possible to use all of AGD's features in a single game so it remains to be seen which new functionality will prove to be the most popular.

Finally, what advice would you give to anybody looking at making their first *Arcade Game Designer* game?

Enjoy yourself. It's designed to be simple to pick up and you don't have to know anything about programming when you begin. Have a play around and see what you can do. Just remember there are still one or two bugs here and there so save your work regularly.



MAILBAG

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STAR LETTER

CONSOLE WARS

Dear Retro Gamer,
With another console war potentially on our hands with the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One I wondered what past wars (for lack of a better term) were like. I'm only 25, so when I was a kid I don't really understand that there was a difference between the Master System and NES or the Mega Drive and SNES – I just loved playing games. I thought it would be interesting to find out if the whole 'fanboy' thing has been going on for years, or if it has only been since the rise of the Internet and social media. When did everyone stop appreciating these systems for what they are and become so narrow-minded?

Also, your piece on Myst was excellent and took me back to playing Riven in my Saturn days, which I recently dug out (among others – I've attached some pics. Can you believe the price?)

I've always loved the magazine guys – keep up the good work. Cheers,

Unfortunately Chris, console and computer wars have been raging forever. Darran would routinely get into arguments about why the Amstrad CPC 464 was better than the Commodore 64 and Spectrum, and this continued as newer systems came out. Even today it's still raging, and you've only got to visit popular forums to see that some people just can't move on. Maybe we'll do a feature on it at a later date.

From the forum

» www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know:

Your favourite fighting games

Hiro
[illegible] goes to *Fighter's Spirit* for the Amiga. Huge, well-animated characters, beautiful backgrounds [illegible] be mouse-only for a fast game, great use of the glorious AGA chipset.

Antrhad2097
[illegible] five pounds [illegible] hours and [illegible] game I could probably have bought the arcade cabinet. Naturally, I'm also a big fan of *Way Of The Exploding Fist*, which was the first home computer game [illegible] the mission of Karate Champ.

nc11
[illegible] the Amiga [illegible] the 3D nonsense to deliver pugilistic perfection, they got it right in 1988 and it still hasn't been bettered, in my opinion. Hence it's not just boring but pugilistic perfection just sounds so good.

RetroBoh
[illegible] *Fighting Spirit* [illegible] major plus was being able to [illegible] the game runs slower than the NES version.

Liam1882
Right, I'd name the arcade version, the Saturn, the [illegible] well, everything really. Rock solid AI, fast fighting mechanics, but being able to fight as the Daytona car against whatever the flip Jeffries. Yes please!

Hitman_Halfcap
[illegible] *Killer Instinct* on the but either the Mega Drive version, but [illegible] the only way can do the moves consistently.

Megaminer
[illegible] *The Chaos Tower* on PSP. The best version combination of my favourite fighting game series. It's practically arcade-perfect, portable and I have no problems using the PSP D-pad to play it.

HaleyoaDaze00
[illegible] *Mortal Shadows* [illegible] a different level to everything else.

Dave300
[illegible] *Virtua Fighters*, [illegible] *Virtua Fighter 5*.

Ok, Sexy, we don't blame you. The idea of getting it over the head with a pillow

READY TO CHECK

Dear Retro Gamer,
I have a story to tell you. Back when I was young and used to play on my C64 – especially at night when I was completely engrossed in a game – my brother would come up behind me, quietly in the dark and whack me as hard as he could across the head with a pillow. Let me tell you, this was something of a shocking experience, especially whilst treading stealthily through the lower bunkers in *Castle Wolfenstein*. I'd usually get him back though, please don't think I was a wimp. When it was his turn to play, I would do the same and sneak up behind him, usually around midnight, and thwack him hard across the head with my Year 7 Maths Primer book, which was about 856 pages long. That usually did the trick.

Thanks so much for all the tremendously wonderful work.

There's nothing like sibling rivalry is there? One particular favourite trick of ours was to sneak into our brother's room and change all his cassette tapes so they were all in the wrong boxes. We got up to other shenanigans but they're not really suitable for print.

Dear Retro Gamer,
The other week I went to a car boot. It's getting a lot busier now because most punters want to charge silly prices because 'that's how much it is on eBay'. Anyway, I was mooching around seeing the normal ridiculous prices – a £30 NES here, a £40 PlayStation there – when I found a boxed stuffed with Sega Saturn games.

Flicking through the collection I immediately saw a copy of *Panzer Dragoon Saga*. It was missing the outer sleeve, but I knew it was worth money. Both parts of the game were being sold separately at £5 each (they clearly didn't know it was the same game).

As I paid the money to the old woman who clearly wasn't the original owner of the game, I blurted out, 'Could I not have both for a fiver? They're actually one game.' She happily agreed, leaving me alone with my snaffle. Does anyone else have a similar tale of self loathing that they'd like to share?
Dean Saunders

Don't beat yourself up too much Dean. While you should be scolded for pulling the wool over someone's eyes like that, we're sure you're not the only reader to have done something like this in the past. Darran once bought *Baldur's Gate* from a charity shop for 50 pence because the woman selling it thought it was a DVD film and not a £5 game. What a cad.

WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag **Retro Gamer Load 3**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that meets our soul. Failing that, something funny with swear words or something *Strider* related will go down just as well.

Sega Saturn [illegible] *Panzer Dragoon Saga* [illegible] Software [illegible] the lower panels

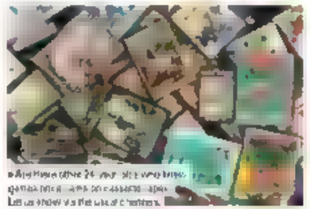
Good afternoon Darran
I was wondering if you have published an issue with a feature for the Sega Mega CD or 32? If so, what was the issue number and is it still available? If not, will you republish it in the future?
Kind Regards,

Unfortunately Martin, the issue in question (issue 61), is long out of stock, meaning you'll have to head online or wait for our next bookazine. It's a cracking machine and worth a look if you don't already own one.

Hello guys,
I've just got hold of a copy of the latest magazine (don't blame me, a wedding got in the way of my picking it up last week) and I felt like needed to say something about Ian Lea regarding his column. My younger brother, who is the same age as Ben, not only knows why cassettes are linked with videogames, but also used to fight me to play some of said cassette-tape videogames on our Commodore 64. Many happy and fight-filled summer holidays were broken up by a game finally loading, or by either one of us mocking the loading screens with their dancing rainbows and flying arrows.

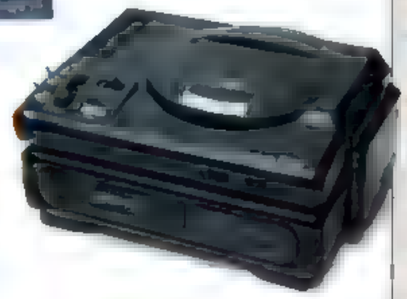
Fear not Ian – some of the young know their stuff!

That's good to hear Bekky, although it does concern us how little knowledge there does seem to be of gaming's past. We hear plenty of comments at work, on forums or at home that instantly remind us of how old we are. One such comment was from someone who didn't know who Strider was. What a terrible world that must be to live in.



All these [illegible] games [illegible] Let us know via the usual channels.

Space Hulk
This month Darran has been watching an about *Space Hulk*, as it's just been released in digital form on PC and Mac. He instantly turned overseas in the office with tales of his 2000 edition of the game which is still sitting neat in the box. He can't decide whether to play it or sell it for a fortune.



THE ONES THAT GOT AWAY...

Darran discusses the covers that didn't quite make it

BLISTER'S GUIDE TO BEAT-EM-UPS
This was an early option that didn't really get off the drawing board. The aim was to create a fighter's select screen like you'd get in a game, but it would feature fighters from lots of different franchises. It was a nice idea, but we used too few characters to illustrate it and it just ended up looking a little messy.

EARTHWORM JIM
There's a lot of fantastic hand-drawn art for *Earthworm Jim*, and we felt it would be a great focus for a cover. The idea was to use a blown up version of Jim as a focal point with silhouettes in the background to give the impression of a fairy book. Unfortunately we couldn't find a suitably dramatic image for the main fig.

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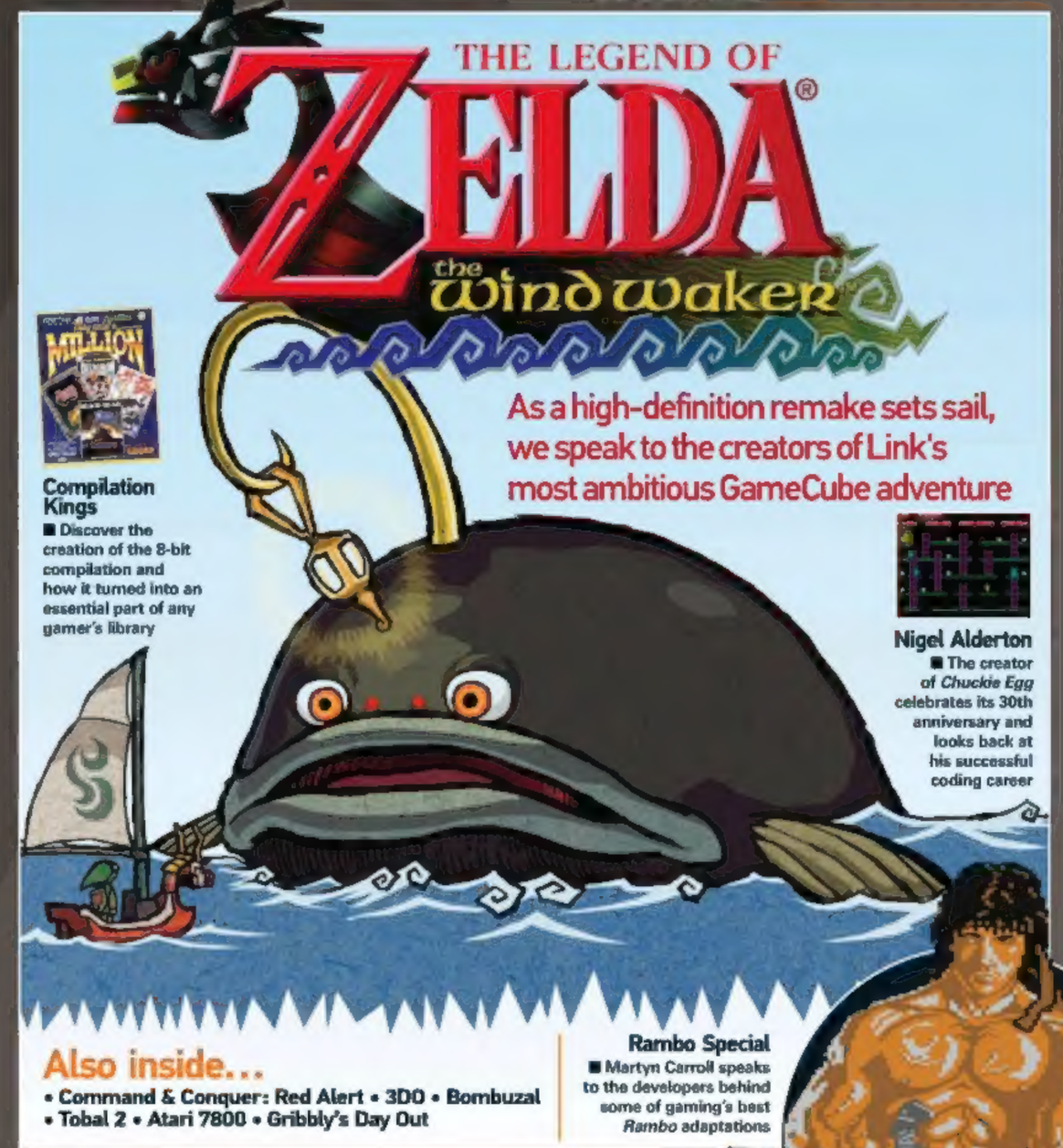

As a high-definition remake sets sail, we speak to the creators of Link's most ambitious GameCube adventure

Compilation Kings
■ Discover the creation of the 8-bit compilation and how it turned into an essential part of any gamer's library

Nigel Alderton
■ The creator of *Chuckie Egg* celebrates its 30th anniversary and looks back at his successful coding career

Rambo Special
■ Martyn Carroll speaks to the developers behind some of gaming's best *Rambo* adaptations

Also inside...

- Command & Conquer: Red Alert
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» Just before it buggered off and neglected Nintendo consoles for an entire generation, Squaresoft chucked Mario into his first RPG and, in doing so, made Legend Of The Seven Stars the Super Nintendo's final Mario title. It was a peach of a game from the makers of the epic Final Fantasy series, and gamers fell head over heels for the isometric witty madness of it all

01

» The final star has been collected and the Star Road is complete. Geno has said goodbye. Now it's time to inspire the intro makers of Stars In Their Eyes with some whizzy star-like schmaltz. Tonight Matthew, Mario is going to be stunned.

02

» An eternity passes as the stars shoot into the sky, leaving a solitary twinkle in their wake. The sword Exor dissolves and blows into the wind. Mario and his gang are rooted to the spot for the entire night in utter awe at this natural phenomenon.

03

» They think it's all over – not yet it ain't. Like an Oasis record, it just can't end so cue some "closure" as we discover the fates of our friends. Mallow is crowned the prince of Nimbus Land. Who'd have thought it?

04

» Bowser repairs his keep, Jonathan Jones eyes the sunset alone, Croco races the Mushroom Derby against Yoshi and Froglucious and his students go to Toadofsky's top gig. Valentina and Booster get married. Bumbling Dodo is confused when Booster darts off, leaving Valentina in hot, passionate, spurned pursuit.

05

» Not to worry, villains can't commit anyway. But look at Mario and Princess Peach – they're well happy. Peach is a latter day Kate with her little waves, but Mario sticks two fingers up. Or maybe it's a sign of peace. Who knows? The loveable scamp. With a wink, he's gone. Cue a parade of characters.

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